

Editorial

Coping with Criticism

No one enjoys criticism and ministers are no exception. When a member approaches the minister and says, 'Friend, I want to say something to you in love,' the defences immediately go up, the eyes narrow and one prepares to sustain a frontal attack either on the choice of hymns, the level of visiting, or the length of sermons. How should ministers react to criticism—whether from elders, members, or even those who never darken the kirk door? It seems there are a variety of responses that can be made.

Barricades

Some ministers appear pathologically unable to cope with any criticism whatsoever. Though the comments are intended in the most kindly way to be helpful—even, at a pinch, encouraging—the unfortunate member who has dared to raise a voice in other than explicitly laudatory tones finds an instant

defensive barricade raised up and the pastor at once clad in full riot gear, complete with cudgel and shield.

My caricature of such ministers is not as exaggerated as might at first appear. There truly are clerics who are so sensitive that they not only spend much of their ministries behind invisible barricades, but also torture themselves at home so that the manse itself becomes a kind of bunker in which to hide. Such persons, of course, ought not to be in the ministry, but alas some of them are, and the only ones who deserve more sympathy than their spouses and offspring are their office bearers and members who have to live with such paranoia.

Bonny fighters

Consider another type of minister. There is the true blue, whose theology is impeccably orthodox, whose preaching is straight-down-the-line exegesis,

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and whose pastoral work is conscientious, considerate and caring. But our man (I haven't yet met a woman minister who belongs to this genre) is expecting trouble from the 'opposition'. Alas, that's how he sees most of his flock. His people are there to resist the work of the pastor and to stand firm against the Lord's work truly being established. Therefore, while he gives himself unsparingly to his congregation and parish, he knows that sooner or later, resistance to the Word will come. So he is ever alert, ready for the onslaught.

If there is no onslaught, however, the implications for all that he is doing will be solemnly serious. 'Alas when all speak well of you,' Jesus said. So unless the criticism comes with the icy blast of a Northeast wind, the ministry must be deficient in some way!

But this fine chap is a bonny fighter. When at last the offensive against him starts, he's ready for it and for each blow delivered, he will land an even harder one back. He's a man who like Samson will defeat the enemies of Israel by extraordinary strength. His weapon? The jawbone of an ass!

The strong silent type

Here is a third kind of reaction to criticism of the ministry. There is the minister who listens attentively to all that is said. With appreciative nods, even smiles, the comments about the new contemporary songs with (for the elderly old lady speaking) unsingable tunes are sympathetically acknowledged. Yes, it must be discouraging for worshippers who have been members of this congregation for over 70 years to attend services and find themselves unable to recognise a single item of praise. The minister agrees with apparent empathy.

But when choosing the hymns for the next Sunday, our strong silent type bears in mind the counsel given to Rehoboam, Solomon's son, by the young men rather than the counsel given by the old men. So he scourges the older members with scorpions and chooses even more way-out songs with even more unsingable tunes. No one will deflect him from his chosen path. After all,

the church must change, or else she will die, and hasn't he been sent to this parish to inflict change on this ailing people for their own good? Our strong silent type cannot deviate from what he perceives to be the narrow way.

Divine right

I recall as a schoolboy being deeply affected by the tragedy of those monarchs who held to the doctrine of the 'divine right of kings'. As parliament began to assert itself and challenge the royal autocracy, these men of monumental folly refused to yield their divine right. Inexorably, disaster overtook them, one by one. With the immature romanticism of boyhood, I sighed over them and longed that they might have had the simple common sense to read the signs of the times and recognise that parliament had to be a partner, not the 'opposition'.

Frequently over these past four decades, I have listened to stories of embattled ministers and detected that the problems in which they were helplessly enmeshed were brought on themselves by a 'divine right of ministers' mentality. They saw their appointment as at the hand of God himself—we agree with all our heart for why else would they be there? But the inference arising was the rock on which their vessel was being dashed to pieces by the waves. Because God had made his will clear to them in the Call to that parish, they inferred that a divine authority was now theirs and hallowed all they did. They had developed a kind of presbyterian popery.

Consequently, their elders, office-bearers, members and even their most loyal supporters who upheld them daily in earnest prayer were all given the same treatment if ever they suggested some way forward which didn't exactly accord with the minister's own thinking. Some left and joined other congregations, disillusioned by the obscurantism of their pastor for whom they once had such high hopes. Others stayed on, unwilling to abandon the fellowship which had been their mother in God, but became mere ciphers, dutifully saying 'Yes, sir, No, sir, three bags full, sir.' Yet others

formed an official opposition which disastrously became the focus of the ministry and featured in sermons, session meetings, prayer-bulletins, as the beleaguered minister likened himself to Moses coping with the recalcitrant Israelites.

Coping with criticism

True, comments can come which reveal the most bizarre perceptions of the Christian ministry. One can be left almost dazed at the apparent absence of the faintest notion of what a minister's priorities and objectives ought to be. So what is the way forward? How ought ministers to react when faced by criticisms? Let me offer a few thoughts for further prayer and reflection by those who may be on the giving side—firing salvos off at their pastor! and by those on the receiving side—the pastors themselves who do often sustain more painful hurts from malicious wounds than their people ever guess.

Underlying reasons

I recall being deeply hurt by a quite unprovoked attack from a lapsed member whom I was visiting years ago while still in my first church. Abuse poured from the man, and I was left speechless. It so transpired that being struck dumb was a good thing, because it gave him the space to say more and more, and as I listened, I realised that his anger was not actually against myself, but arose from a bad experience years before. He had been harbouring bitterness which had festered and poisoned his mind towards me before ever we met. His need was for someone to listen, to understand and to say on behalf of others long since gone, 'I'm sorry you've been hurt so deeply; the Lord is grieved for you as well.'

Since then I have discovered that some underlying cause is behind a fair amount of the criticism ministers receive. Responding to such criticism by attempting to justify or defend oneself is of no use whatsoever. (Indeed, whatever the cause of the criticism, self-justification is to be avoided at all costs!) We must learn to listen, understand and ask forgiveness for

wrongs we ourselves have *not* inflicted. At times, we have to be willing to be scapegoats, and even stand in the Lord's place and accept anger being vented against him.

Over sensitivity

A second comment about criticism is that one must not take everything that is said too much to heart. The over-sensitive pastor may find the ministry too hard to bear. The truth is that what appear to be hurtful criticisms may only be suggestions made on the spur of the moment—suggestions which may contain a grain of common sense.

One must therefore be robust and able to smile as one listens. If the critic senses that the pastor is hurt and even floored by what is being said, confidence will ebb and doubts will arise as to whether the minister is capable of handling what to the critic intends to be a 'normal relationship'. It requires some stamina to be able to hear what is being said, and to recognise the kernel of truth which lies at the heart of the comments.

Let me illustrate. An elder tells his minister in a roundabout way that he does not like his preaching. He informs him that the minister in the next parish (who is a good friend and a fellow evangelical) is an excellent communicator and infers that if he took himself off to listen to him, he would learn a thing or two to his advantage. While the minister is a little hurt by this (comparisons, after all, are always odious), it happens that he hears his neighbour preaching at a conference a few weeks later. As he listens, the truth dawns! The style is almost the same as his own except that his colleague of the next parish has a way of relating the Bible passage to the here and now in everyday terms. While the elder was unable to analyse the difference between the two preachers, what he was really trying to say was that he would love his minister to make the word relevant. Our man worked at adopting a similar approach; the effect on the elder is dramatic! 'Wonderful sermon!' he says at the church door as he grasps his minister's hand with a new firmness and friendliness.

Avoid Aggression

Thirdly, there is no doubt that it is a major mistake to allow personal animosity towards one's critics to grow in one's soul. The outcome of such an attitude will often be aggression which inevitably will be conveyed to one's critic by the dilation of the pupils, and a furrowing of the brow. We must be resolved to keep an open heart and good relationships. Every minister must have a short memory for hurts.

It will be hard in the crowded room deliberately to cross the floor and greet as a long lost friend the person who has been causing us great heartache by constant carping. It is not easy at committee meetings to listen to complaints and resist the temptation to smack the complainer down with a caustic, unanswerable point of order. Far better to show patience and then ask by name one or two others present to respond. (It has to be 'by name' because it is astonishing how when the minister is under attack, others are numbed into silence.) In that way, a balanced view can be obtained, and the criticisms can be tested to see whether or not they contain valuable insights which ought to be heeded. After all, most of our members are people of reasonable good-will, ready to hear our views and support us when they are sure our aims are for the glory of God and the up building of his church.

However, to balance that we must be on our guard not to give the complainers too much prominence. We must endeavour to be absolutely fair, not to over-react, but to listen, evaluate and take advice. As far as advice is concerned, happy are those pastors who have two or three wise and trusted counsellors among their elders from whom soundings can be taken and the criticisms prayerfully considered. 'The wounds of a friend are faithful.'

Body ministry

Fourthly, I have learned slowly over the years that criticism is kept to a minimum when one is prepared to allow the Body of Christ to be the Body of Christ, with each member fulfilling his or her Christ-given function. It appears to me that

most criticisms are levelled at ministers who gather too much of the work to themselves, and refuse to share responsibilities with others. It stands to reason that if ministers are doing too much themselves, problems will arise which will result in discontent and therefore criticism.

Because they are taking too much on themselves, some at least of what they do will be done inefficiently. More, the work will be restricted to their particular gifts and abilities. My Bible tells me that it was only Christ who had the Spirit without measure. In the local congregation, the gifts are distributed to many. Frustration and stultification can only result from the folly of a one-person ministry which does not allow the Body to be the Body.

The more excellent way

In the final analysis, the more excellent way is the only way. Pastors who truly love their people don't need to tell them. Love cannot be concealed. It communicates itself in all manner of ways. But love is intensely practical in its expression as well as being immeasurably broad in its scope. Loving God cannot help but issue in love for his church. Love for his church will also issue in love for the community in which it is set.

The wise pastor therefore will seek to identify with the whole community and will make time to attend the strangest of functions to make that identification. For love builds bridges so others can find a way across the gulf which today separates the church from so many of the population. Our people will sense that love and will return it.

While it must be acknowledged that the word of truth will always be opposed, it is generally those in high places in the church ('some who were once flaming evangelists') who in the main will be our antagonists and not the common people. Most in most congregations will love the pastor who loves them, their church and their community. And isn't that getting near to the very heart of the Gospel?

—David C. Searle

A Biblical View

The Choice and Appointment of Elders

The choice of elders

First, elders were essentially appointed by the Holy Spirit. In Acts 20:28, that significant passage where Paul calls the elders to meet him at Miletus, he identifies the fact that the ultimate appointment comes from God. It is, he says, 'the Holy Spirit who made you overseers'. In the deepest sense, that should always be true. Appointments to the eldership should be recognisably God's appointment.

But secondly, the apostles themselves were the instruments of the Holy Spirit in making the appointment of elders. The first is in Acts 14, when Paul and Barnabus have completed their first missionary journey. There we read that Paul and Barnabus appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust (v.23).

Thirdly, the apostles at times delegated the authority to appoint elders. For example Paul reminds Titus that the reason he left him in Crete was that he might 'straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint (or ordain) elders in every town, as I directed you' (Tit.1:5). While the ordination and appointment of elders has to do with apostolic direction, clearly it is given to Titus by the apostle. However, the principle is clear enough in the

New Testament that the Holy Spirit appointed elders, generally working through the apostles, though they at times authorised men such as Titus and Timothy to undertake this great responsibility.

The meaning of 'ordination'

The Greek word for 'appoint' or 'ordain' is a very significant and interesting word. It can carry three different meanings and it may be that in the New Testament it is used at times with all three of its possible connotations.

First, it can mean simply 'to stretch out the hand'. Secondly, it can mean 'to appoint by a show of hands', so when they appointed elders, some conclude, this was by the election of the people of God who appointed by a show of hands. Thirdly, it can mean 'to appoint or elect' without regard to the method.

I am inclined to think that the appointment of elders, as in Acts 14 for example, was by the 'stretching out of hands' in the sense of laying of hands upon them. That means the elders' 'appointment' or 'ordination' meant that hands were laid upon them. Negatively, in this regard, we find references to *not* laying hands on anyone suddenly—that is, not appointing or ordaining people to service without due regard for the need for time to assess and understand the gifts and calling of the individual. But, whatever method was used for se-

lecting and ordaining elders, there are two primary things we must have in mind.

The office seeking the person

The principle here is simple: the office is such that all selection of elders needs to be made on Biblical criteria, never on worldly criteria. No one should be chosen for the eldership because he has been successful in other spheres of life, or because he is a person of significance or influence or leadership in commerce, industry or the professions. This is one of the things for which we are paying a price in the churches in our day. In the past, we have been moved by worldly considerations in terms of the selection of elders.

Nor should the choice of future elders be on the grounds of popularity. It is a grave error to think that the most popular person is the best qualified person to exercise godly leadership in a congregation. We must, therefore, proceed on the basis of the Biblical criteria alone.

Readers may ask, 'But what are these biblical criteria?' They are set out for us in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus 1. When God is raising up people of such quality, we shall certainly see him bringing them to the fore in the fellowship in which they are to serve. Again, you may ask, 'How will that be evident?' In various ways we will see people emerging in the life of the congregation who are gifted,

of the Eldership

**The third article in a series of four by
Rev. E.J. Alexander**

godly, qualified leaders. They will gradually come to our notice and will almost be 'displayed' by God before the fellowship of his people as potential leaders and elders. God produces them: we simply recognise them. And the outcome will be that pattern which is evident in the church in Antioch in Acts 13: 'it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us to separate these men for this ministry'. Thus it was 'they laid hands on them and sent them forth'. Now of course this process required God-given discernment and wisdom, for which we need to pray.

I believe this to be of cardinal importance. And this is what I call the first main emphasis. Elders are called and equipped by God and then are recognised and appointed by us.

The person seeking the office

But that is only one side of the picture. That is, if you like, the office seeking the person. There is another side. I wonder if you have ever noticed in 1 Timothy 3:1 that the person may seek the office? 'Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.'

We are so unused to this idea that I rather think our immediate reaction is to say, 'How utterly improper and unacceptable that anybody should seek the office of the elder!' The future elder, we feel, should be a bit like the candidate

for the Speaker's chair in the House of Commons who feigns the utmost reluctance to take on such a high position.

Let me suggest to you that it is very difficult to hold that view in the light of what Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3:1. Here Paul clearly says to Timothy, 'If anybody has set his heart on being an overseer, he

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desires a noble task.' Let me put it to you further that if we believe in the equality of all elders, teaching and ruling, you would never expect those who are called to the teaching eldership to say, 'Well, I have never thought about going into the ministry but, if you drag me into it and persuade me, I shall go.' The person rather comes and says, 'I believe the hand of God is upon me. I believe the Spirit of God is persuading me. I believe that God is calling me to this ministry and I want the church to test my call.'

Nationally, the church tests the call of teaching elders. I have been involved in the selection schools for candidates for the ministry and what we are doing there is simply saying to these people

who come, 'We are here to test your call but you yourselves need to be sure that God has called you.' But also locally, we must test the call of potential elders in our congregations.

Seeking service not office

I wonder if we have given enough emphasis to this issue in our thinking about the eldership, 'If any one desires the office of an overseer, he desires a good thing.' It may be that they seek the eldership with humility of mind and not because they are interested in the office as such. You see the essence of the elder's ministry is not office, but service. So because certain ones have begun to recognise that God has laid his hand upon them and given them a burden for the flock of God, they may well begin

in the right way and here I am thinking aloud and asking questions. I have three questions.

Firstly, I wonder if we give enough weight to the fact that it is God who produces those elders who are appointed by the Holy Spirit. So often we wrest the initiative from God. 'We need ten new elders,' we say, 'let's look around and see who are the most suitable (or the least unsuitable!) of those who are available'. But the reason why we need ten is because the administration in which we are involved is such that we must have ten. Should we not rather say, 'Is it obvious to us that God is raising up godly people amongst us for this ministry and, if not, could it be true that we would be better without the wrong kind of elder'?

Do we give enough weight to the fact that it is God who produces elders and is that conviction reflected in the way that we go about seeking and ordaining them?

to know something of this desire of which Paul is writing. Ought we not to expect some people to come to us and say, 'I want to share something with you'? For our part, we ought to have the discernment to know whether it is because they have an arrogant desire for prominence or whether they have a humble, godly burden for caring for the flock of God. 'God is calling me to this ministry.'

We need to be consistent

If we are going to be thoroughly biblical, ought we not to be biblical in this matter as well as in others? Yet too often we are not, when it comes to 'the person seeking the office'. Might this be one of the evidences that we do not in fact view the ruling and the teaching elder as in true equality? In the light of all this, I have doubts in my mind as to whether we go about the choice of elders

time in prayer, thought and consultation before we set about appointing elders? I am not going to comment on that except to remind you that the Lord spent the night in prayer before he appointed his apostles. I leave that with you for your own further discussion and reflection.

Thirdly, I wonder if there ought not to be a period of time between the selection of elders and their ordination in which we engage in instruction and preparation and training. I find it of interest that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland now insists on this and elders-elect have to be examined by a sub-committee of the Presbytery to ensure that the instruction has been properly carried out.

It is understandable that there should be a disparity between the prolonged period that the teaching elder will receive and the period of preparation that the ruling elder will receive. But when the difference is that the ruling elder has none (as in Scotland too often is the case), that is surely wrong and so I wonder whether we need to rethink this whole area.

My three questions—and I repeat I am thinking aloud—are intended to challenge us all to think biblically. Do we give enough weight to the fact that it is God who produces elders, and is that conviction reflected in the way that we go about seeking and ordaining them? Do we take enough time in prayer, thought and consultation before we set about appointing them? Ought there not to be a recognised period of time between the selection of elders and the act of ordination, in order that instruction and preparation may be thoroughly given? It is commendable that more and more Kirk Sessions are engaging in ongoing training. But my concern is with the serious need for preparation before ever elders are ordained.

In the final article in this short series, we will consider something of the work of the elder.

—Eric J. Alexander

Lawrence Eyres, who has written an excellent treatise on the eldership, says this: 'When an arbitrary number is the main criterion for choosing some to be elders, the church will certainly pay for its folly when they turn out to be scripturally unqualified and there is often no end to the payment.'

I am bound to say too that this does concern me and I acknowledge that my own thinking and practice in the past has too often been, 'We need so many elders to deal with so much work that we are engaged in and to pastor so many people.' It may well be right for us to cry to God to produce that number we need, if we are truly convinced of the need but simply to say that because the administration requires this number therefore we will ordain this number is an extremely dangerous policy. On to my second question.

Secondly, I wonder if we take enough

Postmodernism

Rev. Dominic Smart, Minister of Logie St John's Cross, Dundee

Without doubt, postmodernism is one of today's buzz words. But what is it? How should we understand it? Is the cultural, possibly global, condition of postmodernity, described and articulated by the -ism, basically any different from modernity? My aim in these two articles is limited. I want to describe some of the principal features of postmodernism (or PoMo as it's sometimes called), particularly as it relates to our Christian thinking. Towards the end of the second article, there will be some pointers as to how we might begin to respond.

I do not want to start out with a quick definition of postmodernism. Instead I'm going to sketch a portrait of two postmoderns, called Najat and Fiona. They are real people, with some features borrowed from others that I know. You may well know a Najat and Fiona yourself. (If you don't, believe me they exist. It may be that if you scratched the surface a little, some young adults you know would be very like this couple.)

Having painted a quick sketch of a postmodern couple, I'll then look at the palette that has been used and the four

major colours or themes of postmodernism.

Najat and Fiona

Najat is 31, an accountant who is doing fairly well. Fiona is 29. Like Najat, she's a graduate working in the customer relations department of a supermarket chain. They are living together, with a vaguely positive disposition to marry when the time is 'right'. Najat's parents are of Indian origin; they fled Idi Amin's Uganda in the early 1970's. Najat's father runs several prosperous newsagents stores. Fiona's parents are from Perth. Her Dad works in insurance and is a keen golfer, therefore is rarely in the Kirk on Sundays though a member. Her mother was once a nurse and is in the church two out of every five Sundays. There is a real chance she'll be asked to become an elder in the not too distant future. Despite initial upset, both sets of parents are now quite happy that Najat and Fiona are living together, and they have come round to thinking that maybe there is not so much wrong in it anyway. At least they love each other and are very happy.

Najat and Fiona live in a first floor flat in Kelvinside and their names are on a

Rennie Mackintosh brass plate on the door. Their flat (and since the way we create our own space is an aspect of popular postmodernity I'll describe some of its details) is fashionable and comfortable. It's carefully decorated. On the walls you will see (imitation) icons from Byzantium and Russia. You'll also see two large modern paintings (prints) by Ben Nicholson and Paul Klee. The architectural styles of Glasgow are also reflected in several paintings. There are some Islamic-style wall hangings around as well. In their living room are wrought iron candlesticks with lamps on them and a wildly eclectic mixture of ornaments. There is an abundance of natural materials—stripped pine, mahogany, hessian floor-coverings, as well as polished steel and glass. They have an extremely tasteful sound system. Their collection of CDs is wide-ranging. Nat King Cole rubs shoulders with Mozart; Carols from Kings are side by side with Madonna; Lesley Garrett mixes with Gregorian chant, U2, Sting and Bananarama. Najat's notebook PC is modern linked to the office and naturally they surf the Internet at regular intervals. On TV they like to watch

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rugby, Panorama and Coronation Street, The X-Files and ER; they video old films because they're quaint and engaging, and they also occasionally video Blue Peter just to see how much it's changed since they were children.

Najat and Fiona enjoy weekends with their friends from university. Their friends shop at Sainsburys, Next and Marks & Spencers. They meet up around each New Year at a pleasant hotel near Perth, where they dine, stay the night and have a very grown up time. That's been going on now for five or six years. Amongst their friends are those who are single and live as single, those who cohabit, and those who are married. There has been one divorce already in their circle.

Najat and Fiona are very nice people. They are polite and broadly tolerant. They are unperturbed by what once would have been frowned upon, particularly their cohabitation. Concerned about the environment, they belong to few organisations except for membership of the World Wide Fund for Nature (the only organisation they belong to). Spontaneously suspicious of politicians, they also hate animal testing of cosmetics. They are very concerned about personal finances. They will listen politely but not take advice unless they asked for it. They do not often ask their parents, but they ask their own friends. (Fiona sometimes seeks advice from her Grandad, for whom she has a particular fondness.)

If they approached a minister to take their wedding, he would find them extremely thoughtful and open on the surface. They will readily talk about faith in a general and non-committal way. On the surface they are not hostile towards the Christian faith. They believe in something and will tell you they believe in God. They certainly believe there has got to be more to this life than just earning money. They would enjoy attending church and would find the sermons intellectually engaging. They will pose quite naturally as young adults for whom the church should be making room.

I want you to bear Najat and Fiona in mind because as we go through what may seem to be quite abstract, philo-

sophical material I will keep relating it back to the sketch I've just painted. It may help to ground it all a little in the world that we are more familiar with.

Major Themes of the Postmodern Palette

What are the colours that have gone into the palette for the painting of that portrait? I've chosen four, the first of which we'll examine at length in this article: the remaining three will appear in the sequel.

There is no Big Story

This first colour has been the most important in the sketch. It has served as the wash on the canvas and it will pick up all the highlights. It is the colour that lends the distinctively postmodern hue to every other colour. There is no big story. If you want to understand postmodernism then you have to get a grip of this essential feature.

In 1979 the philosophy Professor Jean-François Lyotard wrote what has become a famous report for the Province of Quebec's Conseil des Universités (available in English¹). In that report he defined the postmodern condition as 'incredulity toward metanarratives'. (If you started to read this article hoping for a nice easy definition of postmodernism you will probably not recognise it in that phrase 'incredulity toward metanarratives'! But that is the kind of language that a lot of the writers on postmodernism use). Incredulity: we know what that is. But what are metanarratives? Metanarratives are the big stories, the great intellectual themes, the grand descriptions that dominate large areas of thought and culture.

Foundational Claims

Metanarratives have three particular properties to them. First, metanarratives make what are called foundational claims. That is, metanarratives claim to be able to provide a foundation for sure knowledge; a foundation for certainty about the world in which we live and about ourselves in it.

Second, they have all exerted dominant influences from time to time on

philosophy and the arts, on education, on politics and social organisation, on theology and metaphysics.

Third, metanarratives have been criticised, modified and replaced by other metanarratives. They are set in distinction from, or opposition to, each other, often because one has critically, but not entirely unsympathetically, analysed another.

Modernism is primarily and fundamentally the view that there is a metanarrative. Postmodernism is the view that we have moved beyond a world dominated by a big story.

Rationalism

There are several metanarratives beyond which postmodernism moves. Naturally, the major one is modernism: the big story of reason. We trace it back to 1637, when René Descartes published his 'Discourse on Method'.² In the fourth part is the (in)famous passage where Descartes wants to find out what he can be certain about—what the foundation for knowledge is. He systematically doubts everything in the world outside his mind, even his own body (this world forms the *res extendens*, the 'extended thing'), until he arrives at that which is going to provide him with certainty—that he is thinking. His rationality (*res cogitans*) provides his foundation: 'I think, therefore I am.'

When Descartes published the Discourses, he set in train a massive metanarrative. Sometimes it is called the Enlightenment, sometimes rationalism, and has historically become intertwined with what seems superficially to be its opposite: the inductive empiricism of the English philosopher Francis Bacon.³ This is the big story of reason, logic, rationality.

Other metanarratives

Another big story would be beauty. In 1820 John Keats wrote his poem 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', the last couplet of which reads, 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty. That is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.' Keats was expressing (not inventing) the metanarrative of romanticism. Neither reason nor observation, but rather beauty gives the

foundation for knowledge.

Another metanarrative would be Marxism—which has to do with the emancipation of the working subject. Another metanarrative would be capitalist democracy, and obviously Marxism and capitalist democracy stand in critical opposition to each other.

Another metanarrative would be existentialism. As John Macquarrie points out, existentialism is a 'style of philosophising' rather than being a homogenous school of thought with a tenet of belief and doctrines to which all existentialists subscribe.⁴ Thus we have existentialists as diverse as Friedrich Nietzsche and Rudolf Bultmann. The way of looking at the world which focusses on the existence of the knowing subject at the centre of things is the existentialist metanarrative.

God our metanarrative

The reason why Lyotard's definition is better than some others is that some define postmodernism as if it was simply a movement away from thought since Descartes. But postmodernism is a movement away from belief in any metanarrative. That means it is a movement away from metanarratives that come from other places; it is also a movement away from metanarratives that have been around long before Descartes. We Christians have a metanarrative. Our big story is not the Bible, it is God himself. He is truth and all truth is his. God himself is our metanarrative. Postmodernists are as uncomfortable with our metanarrative as they are with more recent ones like modernism.

A unifying thought system

Two more questions about the metanarratives. How do they function? Why do postmoderns like Najat and Fiona no longer believe them?

Metanarratives function in four main ways. First of all, big stories provide a unifying system of thought into which all other ideas can be ordered. Sometimes that system might be called a matrix. Sometimes (after Thomas Kuhn's epoch-making and controversial work 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions'⁵) it might be called a paradigm.

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They therefore provide a matrix or paradigm which enables other ideas to cohere. When you are ordering your ideas, you are not simply placing them in some sort of relation to the overall grand narrative, you are placing them in particular relation to one another.

Think for a moment of da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa'. Imagine taking a scalpel, removing the smile and sticking it on to the opposite wall in the Louvre. Even if you spent a year gazing at that smile with your back to the original portrait you would fail to understand the smile in relation to the whole canvas, and you also would have failed to see it in relation to the rest of Mona's face. You'd never understand why the colour of her lips was this and not that, why the mouth curves mysteriously this way and not another. Metanarratives provide the cohesion and consistency for our ideas that make them work together. In fact, one of the reasons why one big story gets replaced by another is that it cannot cope with an increasing number of inconsistencies—anomalous facts and observations that cannot be explained or predicted and therefore cannot order or cohere. The new paradigm can cope with all that the old one coped with, and all that it couldn't cope with—for a while.

Assessment of truth

Second, metanarratives function in a way which helps us assess the truthfulness of statements. Keats writes 'Beauty is truth, and truth beauty' and a Logical Positivist like A.J. Ayer is sitting in the background saying, 'I'm not sure if we can think about that metaphysical statement in terms of truth or meaning because we cannot approach it in any of the normal ways of justification. It's an *a priori* statement that hasn't come from a previous analysis or observation'.⁶ Big stories function by providing a means of assessing the truthfulness and the meaning of everybody else's statements.

Direction

The third way in which metanarratives function is by providing a direction for history. If you have a big story, then you have some way of defining what is or is not progress. Obviously, for capitalist

democrats history is progressing entirely differently than for Marxists. Similarly, for rationalists and romanticists history is going in different ways. Likewise for Christians and atheistic existentialists. It is the big story that provides a sense of direction and progress for history.

Social control

These second and third ways in which metanarratives function lead inevitably to the fourth. Metanarratives (so say their critics) provide a means of social control, manipulation, oppression, marginalisation. If you are part of a group which holds to one particular big story, with its definitions of truth and meaning and its direction for history, and you have power in society, then you can decide that what others think is wrong. You can marginalise and silence your critics if they believe something different to you. History is littered with examples of big stories providing the means of social control. Only recently we have seen the breakdown of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism. If ever there was a metanarrative that provided a means of social control it was Marxism or its Stalinist variant.⁷

If that is how metanarratives function, why is postmodernism disbelieving them? Why are there no big stories any more?

Failure

First, there is no big story because modernism, with its 'techno-science' and other competing big stories, has simply not delivered the goods. People see a world which is heavily polluted, torn by war, riddled with social inequalities and injustice, and filled with lousy buildings. Where in this mess is the progress that the metanarratives guaranteed? The big stories have not worked.

Many stories

Second, there is no single big story because there are so many stories to read nowadays. Men's and women's views of the world and the universe are very different. Najat and Fiona are discovering this truth even as you read. They see on their tv screens the complete difference of non-western cultures and they un-

derstand and embrace that difference better than many of their forefathers did. They do not see these vastly differing cultures from around the world; they see the whole variety mixed together in the twin-bladed big blender of global communications and the global consumer market. Najat and Fiona are in touch with a world which is massively varied and immediately accessible to them with a few mouse clicks. They can go shopping in Bombay from their own front room.

Personal perspective

Third, according to postmodernism big stories have collapsed because ultimately they are all a matter of perspective. Where you are, your paradigm, your thought world, affects what you see. Where you are in relation to particular big stories affects what you see in the world and in yourself, and how you interpret it all.

If your paradigm counts, your person also counts. Who you are affects what you see as well. We bring to the world our ability to commit ourselves to it and listen to it: to try to understand it as it is and as it would shape our thinking about it. (Or we can bring to the world our pre-set, concrete-like ideas of what it should be.)

The philosophical basis of the scientific rationalism which lies behind modernism has been well and truly debunked by scientists and philosophers of science themselves. Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend, Michael Polanyi, Harold Brown and many others have broken the modernist metanarrative from within its greatest venture—science. They have done so with a radical re-think of the person who does science.⁸

Your paradigm and your person count as part of your perspective. Most importantly in the articulation of postmodernism, what you've got in your life, your 'phenomena', counts because it also affects your perspective. When you look at the world around you, you see it from within the horizons of your own world, whether those horizons are linguistic, emotional, social, cultural, intellectual or whatever. Whether it is a

text in a book, a glacier, the person you are married to, whatever you try and understand, you bring to it all that is bound by the horizons of your own understanding; yet the text, the glacier, the spouse, have their own 'worlds' with their horizons. Your ability to perceive and understand is affected by the things in your horizon and by what you do with them.

Some⁹ would argue that when you come and, say, look at a text you should try and put aside what is in your horizon and try to understand the horizon of text and its author; then you can let the text re-shape your horizon as you fuse the two horizons together. (Which is surely what we are trying to do when we study the Bible.)

Constructing our own reality

Fourth, big stories have collapsed, so say the postmodernists, because of our ability—necessarily and inevitably—to construct our own reality. We cannot jump outside our knowledge and language and perception of the world in order to test that knowledge and language. So, all the time we are in fact constructing our own reality. Legoland and Disneyland are excellent pictures of a postmodern world. This is from Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, who in the by-going quote Richard Rorty:

'To the postmodernist mind ... we have no access to something called 'reality' apart from that which we 'represent' as reality in our concepts, language and discourse.' Richard Rorty says that since we never encounter reality 'except under a chosen description,' we are denied the luxury or pretence of claiming naive, immediate access to the world. We can never get outside our knowledge to check its accuracy against objective reality. Our access is always mediated by our own linguistic and conceptual constructions.¹⁰ You cannot jump out of your own skin to see what your skin looks like, so we necessarily therefore construct our own reality. Reality is what we make it and want it to be. There is no big story to tell us what it is or ought to be, says the wisdom of postmodernism.

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In the next article, we'll look at three other colours on the PoMo palette: incoherence, pluralism and individualism regarding morality. We'll also hint briefly at how we might respond.

Endnotes

- 1 Jean Francis Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis Press, 1984).
 - 2 René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. F.E. Sutcliffe (London, Penguin Books, 1968).
 - 3 Bacon was the first great modern protagonist of the view that we can only know what we can read from the 'book of nature' by observation. See Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, (first pub. 1623), Ed. William Aldis Wright (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1900).
 - 4 John Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, (London, Penguin Books, 1973) p.13.
 - 5 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed., (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1970).
 - 6 See for instance, Alfred J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (first pub. 1937), (London, Pelican Books, 1971), pp.45-61.
 - 7 It is interesting to note that Francis Bacon's main motive for developing his empiricism was social. He hoped for the improvement of society, rather than the mere control of it, but the practical uses of certain knowledge were at the forefront of his thinking.
 - 8 See Thomas Kuhn *op. cit.* Also, for example, Paul K. Feyerabend, *Against Method*, (London, Verso, 1978); Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, (London, Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1958); Harold I. Brown, *Perception, Theory and Commitment: The New Philosophy of Science*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1977).
 - 9 See for instance Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976). Also Anthony C. Thistleton, *The Two Horizons*, Exeter, The Paternoster Press, 1980).
 - 10 From J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, 'Facing the Postmodern Scalpel', in Timothy R. Philips and Dennis L. Okham (eds.), *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1995), p.134. The quote from Rorty is from: Richard Rorty, 'Pragmatism and Philosophy', in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* ed. Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman and Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1987), p.57.
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Charismatic Worship

**The second article in a series of two
by Professor Donald MacLeod**

I have two main points to make in this second article. The first is that the charismatic nature of the church is apparent in Christian worship. This is already indicated in the Lord's statement to the woman of Samaria in John 4:24, 'God is a Spirit and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.' Both orthodoxy and liturgical propriety are highly desirable. But they are not enough. Worship must be in the Spirit. It is possible only for those who are spiritual, and only in so far as at the very moment of our approach we are filled with the Spirit of God.

Biblical control

Unfortunately, however, we tend to seek this charismatic quality in the wrong direction. Worship is not charismatic simply because it includes guitars, choruses, clapping and dancing. Nor is it charismatic because it is spontaneous, exuberant and enjoyable. We cannot afford to base our worship on the pleasure-principle. That would only be to exchange one form of hedonism for another.

Charismatic worship should be marked by biblical control. The Spirit will not prompt and stimulate us in a way that contradicts what he has revealed in Scripture. Equally, charismatic worship will be marked by self-control. The spirits of the prophets will be subject to the prophets. Biblical worship is not an ecstatic experience in which the worshippers lose all awareness of themselves, the world and God. It retains its sense of the holiness of God (Isa. 6:3) as One august, transcendent and intimidating.

Our confidence in approaching him derives not from the presumption of over-familiarity but from his own invitation. We come with devoutness and humility because we come self-critically. The lips with which we worship are unclean; and so are the lips of those who worship with us (Isa. 6:5).

Preaching

The charismatic quality of Christian worship is most evident in connection with preaching which can never be a merely formal, professional or academic exercise. It is very doubtful whether preaching thus conceived can be fully rehearsed. Indeed, the practice of reading sermons looks suspiciously like an attempt to take the dependence out of preaching and reduce it to something manageable.

In authentic preaching there is always an element of anxiety (angst)—a fear and trembling arising from the dread that the Spirit will not keep us and that we shall be left floundering in our own ineptitude. Charismatic preaching depends on the preacher's being full of the Spirit. The boldness is the Spirit's. The wisdom is the Spirit's. Above all, the power

is the Spirit's. He gives the message cogency, pricking the conscience, causing the hearers to tremble, overriding their prejudices, winning the consent of their intellects and opening their hearts to Christ. In the absence of these factors, our oratory and passion, our logic and profundity, have no more hope of success than a farmer sowing seed on the motorway.

Prayer

The charismatic quality of worship is also evident in prayer. We must pray in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18ff.). He must teach us what to pray for (Rom. 8:26), because we are poor judges of our own needs and even poorer judges of what God has made available to us. He it is also who instructs us how to pray—with groanings—and perseverance, but also with boldness and adventurousness.

Nor should we overlook the further fact that where prayer is charismatic—where it is from the Spirit—it will comprehend the whole church. It is not concerned only with its own needs or those of its own immediate circles. Every Lord's Day, charismatic worship will pray for 'all saints'—all those throughout the world who profess the true faith.

Praise

The charismatic character of worship is equally clear in connection with our praise. The songs we sing are to be spiritual (Eph. 5:19). So is the way we sing them. This is not a question merely of enthusiasm. Spiritual singing cannot be equated simplistically with hearty singing. We must sing with the understanding. We cannot sing the profundis of Ps. 130 with the same verve as we sing such great anthems as Ps. 100 and Ps. 24. There are songs of joy and songs of grief, songs for muted accents and songs for thunderous acclamation.

In charismatic worship, the volume and the tempo will be as varied as the truths we sing and the moods we express. But the volume and tempo relate only to externals. The real glory of charismatic worship lies deeper. We make melody from our hearts—a melody

which results from the Spirit's filling us (Eph. 5:18) and a melody which is quite independent of our circumstances. The charismatic worshipper gives thanks always and in all things (Eph. 5:20).

Every believer a charismatic

The second point in this article is that the everyday life of every believer is charismatic. We have been baptised and filled with the Spirit. Following on from this, all believers have charismata with which they are expected to serve the body of Christ. All do not have the same gifts, either as to number or as to eminence. God distributes to each according to his sovereign will. But none can regard himself as useless or redundant. Each member has a meaningful role within the body of Christ.

Mutual dependence

Without our particular contribution, the body is impoverished—it depends on what every part supplies when it is working properly. The contribution of some members may be a matter of public acclaim. But the others should not feel discouraged. The organism needs their help, their liberality, their compassion, their encouragement, their intercession, their private counsel or whatever else it is that God has conferred on them for the sake of the body.

Conversely, every member needs the charismata of all the others. Not even the most honourable can say to any of the rest, 'I have no need of you' (1 Cor. 12:21). We must all be locked into the body, in living contact with the Head and sustained by its bloodstream.

This is something that Christian leaders should take special pains to remember. We are sometimes dreadfully isolated, with the result that we not only cease to understand the other members but deprive ourselves of the countless little services which they have to offer. We, too, need encouragement, rebuke, company and the down-to-earth word that demolishes humbug and pretentiousness. To pretend to self-sufficiency, emotionally and otherwise, is to risk

warping our own personalities and ending up in foul spiritual deformity.

Splendidly endowed

It is also part of our charismatic status that each Christian is splendidly endowed to meet the exigencies of his own existence. These can be demanding enough—the sufferings of the present time, the wiles of the Devil, the perplexities of decision-making and the uncompromising demands of the Christian ethic. To reflect on the difficulties is to risk paralysis. But we do not face these things with our own limited resources. We are united to Christ. We are filled with his Spirit. We are irrigated and refreshed by the floods of his grace (1 Cor. 12:13).

Our potential is not to be measured in terms of our personal character and heredity, our self-discipline, education and upbringing. We are charismatic figures of unlimited potential. Maybe by disposition and temperament we are weak and inadequate. But as charismatics, waiting upon the Lord, we renew our strength. We mount up, with

wings, as eagles. We run and are not weary. We walk and are not faint (Isa. 40:31).

We have it in us to be more than conquerors—hyper-conquerors—and may even say with Paul: ‘I can do all things in the One who is strengthening me’ (Phil. 4:13). Such a person can endure any pain, bear any burden, climb any mountain, overcome any foe.

Charismatic characters

But there is something greater still. The Christian’s character is charismatic. That character is well defined in Gal. 5:22ff., where all the virtues and attributes of a Christian are described as ‘the fruit of the Spirit’. It is worth noting that fruit is in the singular. The works (plural) of the flesh are manifold and discordant. The fruit of the Spirit is unitary—a cluster of graces linked together indissolubly. Where any of them exists, all of them exist. The fruit is not love or joy or peace but love and joy and peace and faithfulness and all the others.

More important, these qualities are the fruit of the Spirit—not of education

or environment or culture or ideology. The Christian cannot be explained from below. The whole secret of believers’ lives is that they are spiritual—not in some instances, but in all; not occasionally, but habitually. What we are follows organically from the indwelling of the Spirit. It develops out of the implanted seed of God. It is the fruit of our being rooted in Christ.

Among other things, this is of enormous importance for our self-image. We may be mere Christians, relatively unimportant members of the Body. But we are not ordinary. We are in the highest degree extraordinary. We belong to the world to come (Heb. 6:5). We have already tasted its gifts and experienced its power. Our lives are hidden with Christ in God. They are capable therefore of rising as high as their source, to a level of excellence and nobility otherwise undreamt of.

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Preaching

The Lord's Anointing in Preaching

We thought it appropriate in
the month when

Rev. William Still has
announced his retirement
after a ministry of some 52
years to republish one of his
pastoral letters written for his
church's *Congregational Record*
of November 1993. This is
but a modest tribute to the
Chairman of the Trustees of
Rutherford House who has
been so singularly used by
God throughout the second
half of this 20th century.

We should begin by noting that there are two forms of anointing which should not be confused. First, there is the anointing upon the minds and hearts of those who wrote the very words of Holy Scripture. This is a unique and never-to-be-repeated category which we call plenary inspiration.

Illumination of Scripture

The illumination of the Scriptures which has been given us by, for example, such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin and John Owen is something upon which those who have succeeded them may lean and depend. The Holy Spirit who came upon our Lord uniquely, and upon those who penned Holy Writ so abundantly, and upon those who have interpreted it so singularly, is still the same Holy Spirit.

Although, in comparison with any of these, one is far too aware of one's lowliness ever to get exalted ideas into one's head, at the same time, there is the promise of an anointing on the Lord's servants:

It is not for you to know the times and season which the Father placed in his own authority. But ye will

receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and you will be witnesses of me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the extremity of the earth. (Acts 1:7ff.)

More, if there was any dubiety about any of this—which God forbid!—there are those blessed chapters in John's Gospel from 14 to 16 with their repeated promises of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Lord's disciples. It would be the greatest heresy on our part to believe such promises had been withdrawn from those of our generation.

There is also the wonderful truth enshrined in Peter's second letter which, although its subject is holy living more than anointed preaching, says so much about anointing that it is an inspiration to read it through, and savour its highly charged spiritual truth. Peter begins by telling his readers about the unique experience of being with his Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration. He goes on to say:

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well to take heed as to a light shining in

a dark place until the day dawn, and the daystar arise in your hearts; knowing this, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

While this is still speaking of the plenary inspiration of those who wrote the Scriptures, it also gives an indication of the dynamic anointing promised by our Lord to his disciples on his ascension to the Father.

Many anointings

I do not want here to go into the question of the call of God which must come to those who are divinely summoned to minister God's Holy Word. That is an imponderable before which, when it takes place, one simply bows in awe with trembling gratitude. I would rather concentrate on fostering and nurturing the perpetual anointing which needs to be upon those who are divinely called to preach.

It is sometimes said that there is one bestowal of the Spirit upon those called to minister the Word, but that there needs to be many anointings. This is the heart of the matter. We must therefore consider by what means those called to minister the Word as their life's work may maintain that continuing anointing, so that their word is never without the necessary unction of the Spirit, to enable them to reach the hearts, minds, consciences and wills of their hearers.

I have already written about this in *The Work of the Pastor*¹. But beyond the necessary calling, there needs to be a complete acceptance of the absolute and abiding truth of God's Holy Word, a conviction which should grow if fostered by constant study of that Word.

Preaching in the right place

There is also the divine right to minister in a particular place and to a particular people. Many preachers may be comparatively powerless because they are in the wrong place, preaching to the wrong people. If ever such a realisation comes

upon one of us, we should take the most immediate steps to repair it and repentantly seek the Lord's clear will as to where we should be ministering.

But let me be more specific. The Lord surely gives a word from the Holy Scriptures to those called to declare it in particular circumstances which alone fits the specifics of the one preaching that word before that people. Nor does the scheme one may adopt for covering the whole of the Scriptures necessarily interfere with the free flow of the Spirit through the preacher's ministry, provided one is sensitive to the Spirit when he may indicate a suspension of a series or an adoption of a special theme upon certain occasions. This takes us nearer still to the heart of the matter.

Walking with God

We must be in a spiritual state to respond to the promptings of the Spirit with regard to our ministry. That means that we must be people of prayer walking closely with the Lord in daily communion. Whatever may be said of former saints who spent hours on their knees, often early in the day, the prayer life which is called for for the continual task of ministering the Word of God is not necessarily measured at all by the length of its times, but by the depth of its commitment and its walk with the Lord.

The metaphor of 'walking' is good. Most of the apostles use it in their writings. It indicates not so much a turning aside for prayer upon specific occasions, although in a devout life that is bound to happen—though that somewhat contradicts the image of a walk! Rather is the walk known in that closeness of fellowship which is deeper than the activity of finding and delivering sermons, and arises from a complete dependence on the Lord for one's very life.

Put it like this: those who do not seek continual fellowship with the Lord for its own sake, need not seek it for a ministry to others. They have put the cart before the horse with such a vengeance that they will never get his order or his accoutrements right. First things first. 'If you love me, keep my commandments'!

Living in the Lord's presence

But of what does a walk with the Lord consist? It is death to self, and a perpetual rising from that death to live in the Lord's sweet presence. All blessing flows from this. But if in desperation against the sin and selfishness of a carnal nature, one essays the dying without the rising, it doesn't work! The 'fruit' of living will be green, unripe and unsweet to the taste. There needs to be such a thorough-going view of the purpose of the death that the mind and heart are fixed on the goal, and the death is seen as but the route to resurrection.

One can be too passionate about this. It is deeper than emotion. It is a matter of the will, which needs to be so fixed that all the surgings of our most tempestuous emotions will not unseat us or deflect us from our aim. We must be resolved to enjoy that buoyant life of active fellowship with the Lord in everything we do, from sleeping and eating, conversing and serving, to the most holy concerns of the ministry of the Word.

All this is necessary before one attempts to stand before a people to say from his Holy Word, 'Thus says the Lord!'

The congregation

Of course there are external factors such as the nature and character of the people addressed. Much consideration needs to be given to this, so that the Word given fits the people to whom the Lord sends it. They may be a nominal congregation who hardly know the Lord. Not a few may be simply fulfilling their regular attendance at worship, which they regard as a duty without any great enthusiasm for it! In such situations, preachers need to solicit prayer by others to help them overcome the unwitting resistance to the word as it is ministered. The help of trained and experienced prayer warriors is essential, and they should be kept informed of the ongoing weekly response to the ministry.

If the place, time, congregation, preacher and message received from the Lord are all right, then one has every

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The Lord's Anointing in Preaching

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

God-given right to expect the fullness of the Holy Spirit to come upon one in declaring that Word.

Liberty

We may still not feel that in the delivery of the message there is all the liberty we desire. The enemy, if he can do no more, may hide from the us the fact that the word is getting through. Indeed, God himself may be hiding it from us in order to make us to rely on the facts, and not necessarily on an overwhelming sense of power and purpose.

When that sense of liberty comes, one naturally revels in it, and pours forth the word with all the power vouchsafed. One knows one has an anointing, and rides upon it joyously to advance the kingdom by speaking forth in power.

experience, and Satan can add to it by giving one clutching fears that all is wrong and those to whom we are preaching will not want to hear this word. But leaning hard on him is nevertheless everything. It is the only thing to do. Indeed, it is good to be deeply concerned lest one should come to the task with any degree of carnal equanimity!

Lean, and the trusting soul shall prove

Christ is its life, and Christ its love.
Faint not, nor fear; His arm is near;
He changeth not, and thou art dear;

Only believe, and thou shalt see
That Christ is all in all to thee.

He will not—cannot fail!

We must be content to work in the dark and let God bring out to the light only that which pleases him

Indeed, we should look for that. Yet we should not look for the subjective experience of it because that could lead us astray to 'By-path's Meadow'.

Hearts at rest

We must learn not be side-tracked by externals, however beguiling or daunting. Our hearts must be set at rest. Such rest will come first as we reassert our calling, and second as we are assured of our adequate, conscientious preparation of the ministry of the word for the occasion about to be served.

To lean hard on the Lord and have no trust in the flesh can be a very painful

not to have displeased him, is something. Maybe, sometimes, it is everything!

A full script?

Something needs to be said about one's method of preaching in the matter of prepared notes or script. Having ministered for many years from notes of varying degrees of detail and then for the last twenty years having used full manuscripts has been an instructive transition. I don't enjoy not having much eye contact such as I had when I used only notes. For years using a full manuscript and keeping to it fairly rigidly, I had feelings of guilt that I had declined from my former spontaneity.

I now spend an increasing number of hours setting down what I want to say and re-reading it over and over again, seeking to perfect the text from a 'speaking', not a 'reading' point of view. My aim is to make it sound as spontaneous as the Lord originally gave it when I first committed it to my word-processor. Nevertheless, I find the hard work of preparation (not least because one respects those who come to listen) does not hinder the Spirit from taking up the utterance and giving it the thrust and drive and telling effect which conveys it into the minds and hearts of the hearers.

If it is true that the revival which Jonathan Edwards saw took place while he stood and read his sermons in candle light, then, the Holy Spirit will not be hindered by such methods as individual personalities find necessary to perform their God-given task worthily. Not so much better methods, although those should always be improving, but better and more godly ministers!

—William Still

Pleasing God

But that means he will not fail to accomplish his purpose, a great deal of which may be permanently unrevealed to the preacher. We must be content to work in the dark, and let God bring out to the light only that which pleases him. It is sufficient for the Lord's servants, whether they have any knowledge that the word has got through to their people's minds, hearts, consciences and wills or not, to know that they have sought to do the Lord's will. We rest on that. Our service has been to please the Lord, whatever the effect of it may be on others. To have pleased the Lord, or, at least

Endnote

- 1 William Still, *Work of the Pastor*, Rutherford House, Edinburgh, 1996.

Schizophrenic Warfare...

Marylène Walker



**'Arms are withdrawn
From the battlefield
Of love'**

This poem describes years
of schizophrenia for me.
A warfare that still rages
from time to time as I seek
to relate to others.

Where religion has no voice

You can be anything! We are not prejudiced. And yet, within this seeming neutrality, psychiatry itself is indeed a faith as it involves a total view of what man is. Of course, there are many different creeds: some profess that man is merely a chemical compound, while others believe passionately in man only understood through his ability to relate to others; always seen through his relating, the consequences of wrongly relating are for these specialists the core of their concern. Between these two extremes there are many shades of belief, but it is all a matter of belief. Those beliefs can be so strong that they are accepted by some as facts although the contradictions between the many 'plausible' creeds tend to show that it is more faith than facts, a choice of what one believes.

Denial of responsibility

But the common thing in this 'faith of many shades' is that they deny the patient's responsibility: the patient is always a victim and this rings an alarm in my Christian heart as without responsibility there is no sin therefore no repentance. Yes, I am speaking as a Christian, a schizophrenic Christian who had been open in a *total* way to the

psychiatric faith for years. I know the handicap this 'religion' has been in my rejoicing at my salvation through Christ. There was no salvation in my previous (psychiatric) faith, only this hopeless belief that I was a victim. I was tied hand and foot by this idea that I had no responsibility and that I should therefore be looked after by society as a victim can (legitimately?) expect. My voice was the voice of the latest psychiatrist who happened to be looking after me. I had many different psychiatrists but I always found in them a strong excuse to carry on, year after year, with this thought that I was a victim: no matter what can be said of all the medics' creeds, my own was, at the receiving end, I am a victim! That was the acceptable thing to think and (worse) believe with all your heart and all your mind and all your might.

Weaned of my delusions

And yet, as a Christian, I have come to see through my opium of the patients. It was very traumatic for me to see that, basically, like everybody else, medics as well, I am a bad person. I believe that I am fallen in the way the Bible describes, that I am a sinner. A recipe for disaster for someone who is weak of body and tormented in my mind? For someone who needs to be wrapped in cotton wool

to ease the mental suffering? No, no! The truth is that I am a sinner and the truth is sovereign in the mind. Believing a lie is very unhealthy. I was told a lie, I believed a lie, and I was literally given up by the psychiatric institution! They sent me home to die a few years ago. Their verdict: 'We cannot help you.'

And yet, accepting the truth has given me life even though after being cosseted in my delusions for years meant that what Christians call 'conviction of sin' was extremely painful for me, a little like a child being weaned of its mother. Weaning myself of my delusions was like a volcanic eruption. (I am using the word delusion not to describe my psychotic years, but to describe what the doctors of psychiatry filled my head with: I was their spoilt child in a way, I got my own way all the time.)

No health without truth

The point of what I am saying is, once again, that it is of primary importance to know the truth about yourself: without it there is no mental health. The truth is that I am a sinner and yet, that is only half the truth, a truth to avoid if only

one you know about. But, the whole truth is that I have not been given up by God despite the fact that I am so bad. The whole truth is that I am a loved sinner, a forgiven sinner! It would have been better for me to remain a believer of the psychiatric faith if sin had been the only thing. I am a loved sinner. I was not truly a loved human being within the psychiatric religion as my priests and priestesses, the medics, were only doing a job they were paid for: stop the pay, stop the care! Is that love?

Healed by disciplining love

Another thing I want to say is that there has been a lot of godly discipline in my life as a Christian. Is it bad to discipline? In our modern society discipline seems to be the worst evil, everybody runs away from it, and yet, it is the (only) way of love. Here is a little quote: 'No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees! Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be

disabled, but rather healed' Hebrews 12:11–13.

I am looking forward to being a useful and caring member of society, not lamed, not disabled, but healed by the disciplining love of God. I am a sinner but I am a forgiven sinner, I have found the way, the truth, the life which is Christ, my freedom came from love, not indulgence.

I owe the medics my life

Something I need to add is that I got something very crucial from those medics I have just so ruthlessly criticised: they have worked out for me, and for other countless schizophrenics like me an ideal cocktail of anti-psychotic drugs that give me a sound use of my thinking. Without this practical help I would not be here writing today. I also owe them the good will they showed towards me even if sometimes it was misguided. They just do not know about the faults in the system in which they work day in and day out for years, giving of their best very often; it is all a question of zeal without knowledge. I owe them my life.

—M.W.

...Psychiatry as a Faith

The fourth in a series of articles by Montagu Barker on Stress in the Ministry

The Minister as a Member of the Fellowship

When patients see me in my clinic, or are admitted to my ward in hospital, they have been sent to me because they are sick; I treat them, and the state of my health is irrelevant. Similarly, those who go to a counsellor have problems to sort out; a contract is made, and it is considered irrelevant whether the counsellor has problems within him or herself or not. In both cases, the relationships must be strictly professional.

However, the same is not true when someone within the fellowship comes to the minister; the member has needs and so does the minister. Furthermore, they belong to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. It is the failure both to see and experience this which lies behind some of the most distressing situations which I have had to deal with in Christian workers' lives and families.

No pastor

Many ministers refuse to have a pastor, and many cannot find one when needed.

Like doctors, ministers are supposed to be able to look after themselves; they are professional carers, so surely (the question goes) they do not need anyone to care for them, do they? When I discussed this with a very able and godly French minister, I asked him who his pastor was, he just shrugged his shoulders and replied, 'The Lord.'

The essential cause of this is that since entering theological college, ministers' supports are largely clerical. Their sustenance has been the company of other clergy, with fraternals, retreats and conferences. How inadequate they prove; they are the very worst places for ministers to be pastored! Ministers meet and discuss their work, with banal generalities about recent encouragements. I myself have spoken to ministers' fraternals and seen how little real sharing goes on.

How can you say you are depressed and feel a failure, that the work is going badly and you feel responsible? How can you share that your home life is in chaos,

with your wife having gone off you sexually, and the children acting up mercilessly? All you can share is vague generalities, and exaggerate the spiritual growth of the work.

Clergy do not care well for other clergy, doctors care very badly for other doctors and lawyers give terrible advice to fellow lawyers—because they identify too closely with the other person. In medicine, we are well aware of this, if a little ashamed of ourselves. When I see a doctor as one of my patients, I have to remind myself that while in my clinic, he is just someone who has problems. I may meet him later in committees, and see many issues in him that I recognise in myself; yet I must regard him as a person who is depressed. I know that my heart is beating faster and my blood pressure rising, but if I make concessions simply because he is a doctor, I will eventually run into trouble. Some doctors find this easier than others; but we do not care well for our kith and kin because we identify in this way.

Now, theoretically, Episcopal churches should give better pastoral care to their minister. I have been immensely impressed with the caring of some bishops. But I do know that not every bishop gives this sort of support. Nor have I found the quasi-bishops and fellow-ministers of the reformed churches particularly good at giving support either. When a crisis blows up, the pastoral machinery sometimes works well; but it rarely prevents a crisis. The real question is how to deal with issues before the crisis blows up.

A shocking story

Some time ago as the consultant on call for that day, I was asked to see a minister who had become profoundly depressed. It was the beginning of an on-going saga, from which I am quoting with his express permission. Having become depressed, he wrote the following letter to the person who should have had pastoral care of him:

The position here is becoming increasingly impossible: the problems are worsening each week, the pressure is steadily mounting in me to do something. In this tense situation, some action must be taken—the only real answer is to bring my ministry to a close. You will appreciate that this has not been taken lightly or without regret. The last two years here have been dark indeed, testing my faith to its uttermost depths.

I cannot yet say that light shines but only that faith beckons towards that which might be light. In the circumstances, I do not ask for more than that, although I am sure that eventually light will dawn. The implications of this step are far reaching, and I would appreciate your advice and comments on the necessary procedures to be taken regarding church, house, etc.

The pastoral reply came back:

Thank you for your letter of the 21 inst. I am sorry that you feel you must leave the ministry. Nevertheless, if this action helps you to clarify your own mind, and to open for you a field in which you can successfully serve, then I wish you well on the course on which you are about to embark.

Now I come to practical matters. I pre-

sume you have obtained a local authority grant, to keep you and your family during your proposed course of study. You ask for my comments and advice about church and house: it seems to me that having now made up your mind to take this course, you should resign as from three months' time. You cannot reasonably expect the church and the other churches in the area which have been wanting to have a group ministry for some time to wait indefinitely. As the house will be required for the leader of the new group, you should apply to the local authority for housing. As you are aware, you occupy the house on a service tenancy.

Kind regards to yourself and your wife.

This was a most harrowing experience. That minister had an expectation of support and sustaining during the worst crisis of his life. I am very glad to say that some clergy from another denomination gave him and his family the spiritual support they needed during that time. It was I who had to minister to him when he ground to a halt.

To add insult to injury, after a long period of no formal connection with his denomination, he received from one of the church's committees a letter sent five years to the day after he had resigned his charge. It was a formal duplicated letter which read:

We have been asked to review the list of clergy not in pastoral charge; the chairman has asked if any member knew of the following... (there followed a list of names, among which was his own).

That was the ongoing pastoral support he received.

Fantasy fellowships

What lies at the root of such situations? Though I have taught in theological colleges for some years, and believe that they have a very real place in training, in my view they have much to answer for here. So often, ministers never learn to relate to a fellowship after leaving college.

The Anglican college of Cuddesdon, outside Oxford, was started by 'Soapy Sam' Wilberforce when his curates and ordinands began to share life together in his house. When he then institutionalised it, a great opportunity was lost; something which was of the essence of what he gave in the early days was gone.

A college has an esprit de corps, a fantasy fellowship, which becomes the ideal. Compare the recent graduate, who is never quite able to recapture the atmosphere of his undergraduate Christian Union days, and so does not settle into the ordinary fellowship of his local church. In the same way, the minister's craving for that former fantasy fellowship is insatiable. The church fellowship which now seeks to embrace the minister is somehow inadequate to satisfy. Is the reason for this that seeds of clericalism are sown in the college days, as an expectation of fellowship largely with fellow-clergy develops? I am caricaturing: but it seems to be that this inadequacy is present in, and stems from, most colleges.

Wife's resentment

If the student is married, college may mark the beginning of the spouse's resentment, especially if they have a family. The spouse may feel excluded from the college fellowship—the breakfast, the

How can you say you are depressed and feel a failure, that the work is going badly and you feel responsible?

worship and the lectures. She cannot be involved with him in the local church fellowship either, and often feels that she goes down spiritually while he feels that he is expanding, maturing and gaining so much from college life.

The clericalism develops into isolationism, and non-communication with the congregation. How congregations smart under the verbal lashings of new curates! Charles Simeon called them 'congregation butchers'. He had been one himself once.

I well remember my first exposure to an Anglican church; the curate, straight from theological college, would slate and thrash the congregation. How dare he speak in that way, when I knew how many godly men and women were there with a deep spirituality! Given patience,

clergy respect them, that they can discuss their responsibilities, and that the clergy will understand their need to pull in their horns a little at times.

Shared responsibility

This leads to a sharing of responsibility—if the minister also shares things with a few confidants in the fellowship. I well remember my surprise, conviction and challenge when my minister first shared his difficulties with me. That stimulated prayer, concern and commitment on my part. There must be persons within each church—some family perhaps—with whom ministers can pray and talk, expressing their fears, doubts and difficulties. There must be those who will 'own' ministers, loving them, binding up their wounds, comforting

him financially. It was known whose garden he went to, to retire, be quiet and pray. There was nothing exclusive in these relationships—he was friends with all. But these were the special situations. Incidentally, there is no indication as to how frequently he used those closest to him in this way.

Our problem is that we are so often exclusive; that is destructive. Yet there are situations which need to be special for the minister. Despite that, some colleges still teach against having close friends within the congregation.

Daring vulnerability

'God trusted himself to a carpenter and his wife,' Harry Williams has written. 'Christ trusted himself to Judas and to Peter. That is vulnerability which shows.'

clericalism develops into isolationism and non-communication with the congregation

love and a few years, they mellow; but very few really learn to draw from the fellowship.

The whole family

Things are changing and a new generation of ordinands are much more aware of these issues, though they may well get a tough time at college because of this new attitude. Why cannot a student and family be truly linked to a local fellowship and freed from the tug of loyalties? They could become involved in the local church, not with the ordinand as an extra assistant, but the whole family as ordinary Christians taking an active part in that church, members of the fellowship.

That would help the student to listen, to learn and to be ministered to by the fellowship. Many of the leading laymen, from whom most is expected, need the clergy to understand their many pressures, not thrash them to ever deeper commitment. They need to feel that the

the family, or ministering to a minister's singleness.

The minister cannot share with his assistant, as the assistant is only there temporarily to be trained. The assistant cannot share with the supervisor who is the assistant's boss and will be writing reports and references.

Many congregations have no concept of care. But equally, there are many men and women within those congregations that are able to care, but afraid to offer. The first move may have to come from the minister. God will call us to account for our failure to minister to our ministers, and will call ministers to account for their failure to allow the fellowship to minister to them.

The Lord's carers

Jesus had his favourites. It was well known who his special friends were. It was known which house gave him a particular welcome and some good food. It was known which women supported

Surely it is within the fellowship that our true supports must be. It is within the fellowship that all Christians have something of themselves invested in each other, as we bear one another's burdens. It is within the fellowship that our minds, even our minister's mind, is renewed.

Here the ministers can receive feedback on their ministries, and a sober appraisal of themselves. Here the spouse and family can belong, and the difficult adolescent children of the manse can find other adults to relate to and identify with.

I know that these are words of perfection; congregations are just not like that. But unless our ministers believe and practise it themselves, how can they preach it to others? The fellowship will never be like this unless they do preach it, look for it, pray for it, and then pioneer it themselves. Unless they are prepared to be open and vulnerable, how will congregations be prepared to open up to them?

A few years ago, I was being rather

stuffy and difficult with my vicar, Paul Berg, about becoming involved in some parish activities. I was pointing out my difficulty in having several people in the church who were my psychiatric patients. In his inimitable way, he replied, 'You know, Monty, even the witch-doctor has to be a member of the tribe!' That pulled the carpet from under my feet—but it was immensely helpful and liberating. The difficulty is still there, but I do not run off; rather I learn to handle it better. The tension is increased, not decreased—but I now know what I am working towards.

Investments

If ministers function as professionals within their fellowships, they will be treated and used as professionals. Cli-

care for others.

A Scottish divine has expressed this well:

The point is that none of us can work effectively on our own. We must be sent out by the church, by the praying church, whatever non-descript company of Christians that might be . . . many missionaries feel out on a limb, and all on their own. They may well question their calling—unless they can find help and guidance to relate themselves to some group somewhere who are prepared to own them, and who will care for them...¹

Ministers serving in missionary situations at home face similar pressures.

ously wonder whether a high percentage of problems about which Christians seek counselling would ever arise at all, if they had been properly instructed congregationally, and fully integrated into the fellowship of God's people'. I am sure that is true, and that it is truest when ministers themselves are part of such fellowships.

After lecturing one day in a theological college, a terrified student came up to me and asked, 'If I had someone like you in my congregation, what would you expect of me?' I was stumped as I had never been asked that before nor thought in those terms. My reply was: 'I would hope you would study and expound the Word, helping me to apply it to every aspect of my life so that I was not living in two worlds.'

there must be persons within each church with whom ministers can pray and talk

ents do not want to know about the needs or difficulties of their professional carer. The body has only one head and that is Christ.

For the fellowship to mature, it needs to become truly the body of Christ and ministers must become a part of the body. Christ is the head, not the minister. They tell their congregations that they are a fellowship, a *konōnia*, with shares invested in each other. What shares do the ministers have invested in their fellowship? Do they enter into fellowship with them, sharing their weaknesses and also their visions?

Support

I am sometimes asked, not as a psychiatrist, but as an ordinary Christian person, to assess missionary candidates and future ministers. As well as looking at family and marital relationships, I look at who is sending and supporting them. If they have not received care themselves, then I question who is calling them to

Many of those I know who have gone into situations that were regarded as hopeless have again and again found a couple of marvellous old saints to share with, pray with and who have taken a special care for them as a family. Yet previous ministers had viewed the situation as devoid of that kind of support!

Two or three will do who are willing to own, care for and thrust their minister forth into battle. Ministers may not discover this until they have their first charge and then they discover that, all unknown to them, certain people had been patiently fishing in all the waters for their new minister, until up he came—and both 'fish' and 'fisher' met with delight.

Alas, if ministers do not want or expect such people, they will not find them!

Full integration

Michael Griffiths, in his excellent book *Cinderella with Amnesia*, writes, 'I seri-

Now, reviewing my experience of the great needs of ministers, I would add, 'You need to be one with us and in order to be able to do that, we both need to be members of the fellowship.' Who is sufficient for these things? It is God who enables us, and a living fellowship is part of that enabling.

Endnote

- 1 William Still, p. 122 *Work of the Pastor*, Rutherford House, Edinburgh, 1996.

David Searle meets

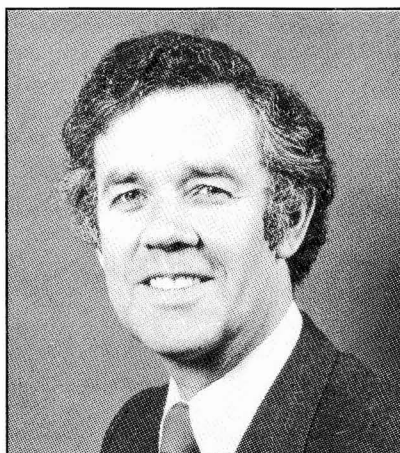
Dr Timothy Keller heads a team of some twelve full-time workers in Redeemer Presbyterian Church (Presbyterian Church of America—PCA), which rents each Sunday the Hunter Auditorium on 69th Street off Park Avenue, New York. Trained at Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, Tim Keller tells David Searle how he came to be involved in founding and pastoring this new, dynamic congregation. A congregation of some 1,900 now worships on Sunday mornings and 1,900 attend the weekly evening services. There are 155 house groups which meet mid-week throughout the city.

I'd like to ask you about Redeemer Presbyterian Church. But before you tell me about the church's vision and mission, could you give us a general introduction.

On that I can be brief because our history is brief. Redeemer Presbyterian Church began in 1989. In February of 1989, a Bible study began in Manhattan with around 12 people. They were Christians, and the purpose of the meetings was to enquire whether or not God would give us a united vision that there was a necessity for a church in Manhattan.

How long did this weekly Bible Study continue?

After two months it was clear to us there was a need for a church. We were absolutely united in our vision for the church and as a result we began an evening service.



How did you make a start?

It was rather an experimental time of fellowship and teaching. We rented a Seventh Day Adventist Church in 87th Street, starting in April 1989. We continued those evening services through to September.

What response did you have in those early months?

During that time it became very clear that there was a need, and very clear that there was going to be a response to the ministry. So my family and I moved from Philadelphia to New York that summer. At the end of September we began the church officially with morning services as well as evening services. Our history dates from September 1989.

What did you feel was going to be different about Redeemer? Why start a new church in a city with plenty of churches already?

Let me explain. In New York city there

are about 3,000 churches and synagogues for 8 million people. Contrast that with Philadelphia where there are about 5,000 churches and synagogues for about 1.5 million people. So New York actually does need new churches.

OK, I hear you saying that New York is not a heavily churchd city. Was that the reason you started a new church?

Not at all. Those of us who started Redeemer have the conviction that one of the most fundamental things a human being needs is meaning in life. Our fundamental needs are not merely psychological and social but also spiritual. We have plenty of psychological problems, plenty of social problems and yet fundamentally people's lives do not cohere unless they have meaning—something to live for, something that is bigger than simply making money.

But do you have a sharper focus to your objectives than the very real but rather general point that men and women have spiritual needs?

George Gallop has pretty much proven that the person who is least likely in all of America to be in church on a Sunday is a young, urban, single professional who lives in a large city. Redeemer is seeking therefore to reach English-speaking, urban professionals in Manhattan. Why? Because they are the least reached and the most secular people probably in our country.

Have you formulated a mission statement to give definition to your vision?

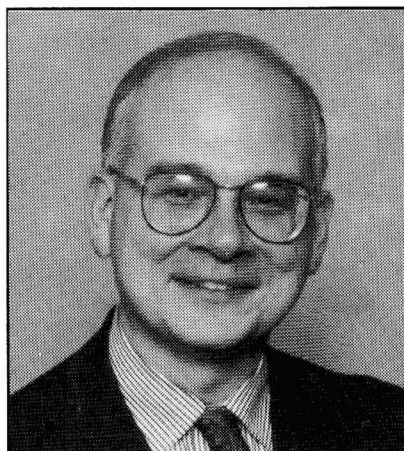
Timothy Keller

Yes we have. Our vision is this: The purpose of Redeemer is to ignite a movement of the Gospel that actually changes the city of New York spiritually, socially and culturally.

Could you fill that out for us?

Within that brief statement are seven principles or characteristics. First of all, we say we want Redeemer to be a movement of the Gospel. What makes Redeemer distinct (and I would say to a great degree has made Redeemer 'successful') is that the Gospel as it's understood historically by Protestant churches keeps the church from being either a legalistic church on the one hand or a liberal church on the other. The Gospel is that God is holy and God is loving. Because he is holy he has to punish sin; because he is loving he does not want to punish us. On the cross Jesus Christ died to satisfy both the holiness of God which had to have punishment for sin and also the love of God which had to provide a way for people to be saved. So the Gospel is: you are more wicked and sinful than you ever dared believe but you are more loved and accepted in Christ than you ever dared hope at the same time! As Martin Luther puts it, we are simultaneously righteous and yet sinful. Righteous in God's sight and loved—yet sinful.

What makes Redeemer unusual in this city is that when you grasp the Gospel like that it avoids the ethos of churches that seem to be very legalistic and condemning on the one hand but avoids the ethos of a church in which



everything is fine and there are no standards on the other hand. Redeemer therefore stays away through the power of the Gospel from either moralism or pragmatism, legalism or liberalism in that sense. That's the first thing. It's very, very important to what makes Redeemer 'Redeemer'.

Secondly, we want Redeemer to be a movement of the Gospel that actually changes the city. We want to be energised by love for the city. When I first came here and we were initially praying about a church in New York we realised that an awful lot of churches in New York city were filled with people who hated the city. They were here because their job brought them here or they were here because their schooling brought them here. They tended to be Christians who just hated the city so they came together for warmth and support just so they could endure living here.

Redeemer believes that the Bible says that the city, though a place of great sin,

is also a place of great grace. It is the most crucial place to minister. If you want to change your society and your world, you need to change the city. We also believe that the Gospel when it really changes your heart gives you a love for the city.

How can you say the Gospel gives you a love for the city?

For two reasons. One of the things that makes a city is its diversity. The Gospel gets rid of a lot of your cultural pride. It gets rid of this idea that what makes me a good person is my culture and my race. The Gospel humbles us and it makes us able to enjoy the diversity of a city.

The second reason we love the city is it is a place where people are very open. They are open in ways they aren't in other places. New immigrants have come here—they are open to changes. Young people are here to start their careers—they are open to changes. People are spiritually searching in a city and when we Christians begin to open our mouths to talk about what we have found, we discover that the people of the city are very, very open. Therefore Redeemer believes that the city is the most important place for a Christian to live and minister.

Thirdly, the vision statement said that the purpose of Redeemer is to ignite a movement of the Gospel that actually changes the city of New York spiritually. By 'spiritually' we mean that we are here to try to persuade people to see the truth of Christianity. We are here to change their lives by connecting them

to God himself through Jesus Christ.

That is a most ambitious goal. How are you trying to do that?

The way in which we do that is we offer people in every place—in the worship services, in our small groups—an intelligent, warm but relentless addressing of the concerns and questions of non-Christians with answers from the Gospel. In other words we are continually saying to people ‘Here’s why you should believe.’

In our worship services for example there is a great amount of time given not just to the needs and interests of Christians but also the needs and the interests of those who are not Christians or who are not sure what they are. As a result we spend a tremendous amount

I’m beginning to get the picture. Tell me about your fourth principle.

You may notice that I have continually said, every time I refer to the vision statement, that Redeemer is a movement of the Gospel. We didn’t start Redeemer just to be a single church. Our understanding is that we want to be an incubator for scores of other churches and ministries. We are not here just to become a big, fat, single congregation. From the very beginning we said, ‘We’re here to be a mother church for many ministries and movements.’ We are entrepreneurial in our spirit. We seek to get people up and out and doing ministry in the city. We try very hard not be turf conscious. Our goal over the next 20 years is to see anywhere from 50 to 100 other churches begun with our help.

deemer is characterised by a holistic vision for ministry or a strong social concern. What this means is that we believe that we should not just be expressing the Gospel through our words—telling people about the truth of Christianity—we have to express it through our deeds. That means we have to be willing to have a non-condescending concern for the poor and for the non-professionals, the new immigrants and the parts of the cities that we don’t live in. (Most of our members are professionals who live either in Manhattan or in more affluent enclaves in other parts of the city).

To start with that means that we put hundreds of our people and thousands of our dollars into ministries that meet basic needs—in ministries to the homeless that meet needs for food, clothing and shelter as well as for drug rehabilitation. Beyond that we want to get to the place where some of our new churches are also moving into broken neighbourhoods and not only showing people how to find meaning in life but also helping people find jobs, refurbishing homes and houses—in other words, dealing with people’s physical, economic and social needs while they are dealing with the spiritual needs.

We call this side of our ministry ‘Christian Community Development’ and our aim is that many of our larger churches will be Christian Community Development churches where our people move into communities of need and use the resources of the Gospel to rebuild those communities.

I am sure our readers will be challenged and stimulated immensely by these first five principles of Redeemer Presbyterian Church. But there are still two more characteristics of Redeemer, aren’t there?

That’s right. You’ll remember we said that Redeemer is to be a movement of the Gospel to change New York spiritually, socially and culturally. The sixth of the characteristics is that Redeemer should be culture-friendly. In many churches members are told, ‘Culture is bad. If you are a Christian you shouldn’t be an artist or an actor. Christians

church planting is as much a part of the budget, the metabolism, the creative energy of the church as is the preaching, worship, music or the crèche

of time in our preaching and among our leaders always seeking to remember what it’s like not to believe so we can address the issues of people who do not believe and show respect to people who have got doubts and questions.

As a result Redeemer has a very strong outward face and virtually everything we do is designed not just to meet the needs of Christians but to meet the needs of the friends of Christians in the church who don’t know Christ or don’t know what they believe about Christ.

Therefore in the very beginning we said, ‘We’re not going to be a church for us, we’re not going to be a church only for Christians, we’re going to be a church also for our friends and associates who don’t believe in Christianity or don’t know what they think. So we have a very, very strong outward face.

What that means is that for Redeemer church planting is as much a part of the budget, the metabolism, the creative energy of the church as is the preaching, worship, music, or the crèche. We don’t see church planting as something we do if the opportunity comes up but we see church planting as the warp or woof of what we are here to do, and ultimately Redeemer’s legacy is not simply going to be one large church—although we hope that Redeemer will be a prospering church—but to leave behind 100 churches with these same basic seven characteristics that I am giving you.

The fifth principle?

Notice we also said we are here to try through the gospel to change New York city spiritually and to change New York socially. The fifth principle is that Re-

shouldn't be involved in worldly pursuits.' In other churches the attitude is 'We're very happy that you are working and we don't really care what your work is as long as you don't break any laws and as long as you give us your money!'

We're familiar here in the UK with both those attitudes. But what does Redeemer say that is different?

We say to our members that we have a vision for helping Christians work in their vocations distinctively as Christians. We have a vision for eventually training people to think through the issues. 'I am a Christian and I am a dancer but what does it mean to be Christian dancer?' Or, 'What does it mean to bring my Christianity and my Kingdom values into my business practices or into my art or into my scholarship or into my work as a media journalist. What does it mean?'

We believe that as Christians come to understand how to press Kingdom values and the values and power of the Gospel into their work, as they learn how to be disciples in their public lives as well as their private lives, that is going to transform our culture. It's going to bring integrity and compassion and justice into government and into the business world. It's going to bring new imagination into art.

That is why we are culture-friendly and why we say to Christians, 'Get involved. Be good in what you do. Work with excellence and Christian distinctiveness.' Our prayer is that while many in New York will say, 'We don't agree with their Christian teaching,' they will also say, 'We're so glad they are here. They are pressing so much value, so much integrity, so much compassion into this city, they are a benefit to this city!'

One final principle?

The seventh characteristic of Redeemer (and I guess I fibbed a little bit!) is not really in the mission statement in the way the first six are. The seventh characteristic probably came up about a year later. We realised that in a city everything we do in the church has to be based on small groups. We came to realise that if you

are not in a small group in Redeemer you're not really in the church, you're not on our radar, you're not able to be nurtured as you should be, you're not able to be disciplined as you should be. We realised that for all of the infrastructure and staff, the only way people are really going to be a community in this city is if people are involved in small groups; and so we have based everything on our small groups—our cell groups.

This has been for me a fascinating and enlightening chat. But what you have said is really quite complex. Is there some way you can sum up briefly the whole burden of your vision and prayers for the Church?

When it comes right down to it, there is a single, driving question that arises from

a Bible verse that has really shaped our vision. 'When the righteous prosper the city rejoices.' Prov. 11:10. We've been asking ourselves now for seven years: 'How can we prosper?' I mean, how can we grow? How can we be a church that by what we do and how we live our life here, New York city will rejoice that we are here. In other words: what kind of church would we have to be for the average New Yorker to say, 'Oh yes, we know about that church!' and they will be drawn by the presence of God with us and his blessing on us. After all, isn't that the scenario described in Acts 2:42ff. of the early church in Jerusalem? When God's smile is on us, the whole city will know!

—David C. Searle

Humanism & Christianity

Imprisoned by freedom
Disappointed by hope
Deceived by truth:
In love with hate
cured of health
seeking to lose.

Liberated by Jesus Christ
Assured against despair.
Honest in safety
Sweetened by friendship
One in life,
Finding and found.

John R. Walker

Historical Sermons

Alexander Peden

A Brief Sketch of his Life...

Since some readers may not be familiar with the details of Alexander Peden's story, we are including a brief sketch of his life which has been adapted from the account of Peden in *Sermons in Times of Persecution in Scotland*, James Kerr, (Johnston, Hunter & Co., Edinburgh, 1880).

Alexander Peden was born about 1626 at Sorn in Ayrshire. After University, he became schoolmaster at Tarbolton, where Guthrie was then minister. He was also precentor and clerk of session to the same church.

He was ordained about 1658 to the charge of New Luce, in Galloway. The Restoration of 1660, followed by the persecution, led to Peden's departure from his parish. As he left the pulpit for the last time having preached on Paul's address to the elders at Miletus, he closed the door, and knocking three times on it, repeated three times: 'I arrest thee, in my Master's name, that none ever enter thee but such as come in by the door, as I have done.' Strange to say, none of the curates ever entered that pulpit. After the Revolution, a Presbyterian minister opened it and preached to a large congregation.

Peden then became a wanderer. In 1666 a proclamation was issued against him by the Council, because he had held conventicles and administered baptism. Should he refuse to obey, he would have forfeited his life. For about seven years,

he evaded his persecutors, having hidden for a part of the time in Ireland. In 1673, he was taken prisoner to Edinburgh and sent for confinement to the Bass. Five years later sentence of banishment was pronounced against him. But at Gravesend, all the prisoners were liberated, and at once returned to Scotland.

Under various disguises he struggled to survive spending much time in Ireland. On one occasion he hired himself as a servant. In 1685 he came back to Scotland, evidently willing to share in the honourable sufferings of the persecuted remnant there. As the ship on which he was crossing to Scotland lay becalmed, Peden prayed: 'Lord, give us a loof-full of wind; fill the sails, Lord, and give us a fresh gale, and let us have a swift and safe passage over to the bloody land, come of us what will.' The winds came while he prayed, filled the sails, and carried the vessel to Scotland. As he parted from his fellow passengers on landing, he said: 'My soul trembles to think what will become of the indulged, backslidden, and upset ministers of Scotland: as the Lord lives, none of them shall be honoured to put a right pin in the Lord's tabernacle, or assert Christ's kingly prerogative as Head and King of His Church.'

At this time he met with many remarkable deliverances from those hunting him. Several horse and foot soldiers came once close to him and a

number of companions. A slight elevation of ground coming in the course of the pursuit between them and their pursuers, Peden called a halt, and uttered this memorable prayer, 'Lord, it is thy enemy's day, hour, and power; they may not be idle, but hast thou no other work for them but to send them after us? Send them after them to whom thou wilt give strength to flee, for our strength is gone. Twine them about the hill, Lord, and cast the lap of thy cloak over Old Sandy and these poor things, and save us this one time, and we will keep it in remembrance, and tell it to the commendation of thy goodness, pity, and compassion, what thou didst for us at such a time.' A mist covered the hill, and Peden and his friends were safe.

As the end of his life drew near, Peden took himself to his home parish of Sorn—to a near relative who lived there, but still he could not frequent his friend's house, and for safety he had a cave dug for himself, and a bush placed as a covering over the cave's mouth. That cave was the House of God and the Gate of Heaven. It was here that he left his last charges with his friends regarding the cause of Christ in the land.

Some short time before his death, Peden had an interview with James Renwick. 'Before you go,' said Peden at the close of the interview, 'you must pray for me, for I am old, and going to leave the world.' After Renwick prayed,

Peden drew him near and kissed him, and said, 'Sir, I find you a faithful servant to your Master. Go on in single dependence on the Lord, and you will get honestly through.' Then Peden prayed fervently as he alone could pray, that the God of Jacob would be Renwick's defence, a covering for his head in the day of battle. A few days afterwards, this tempest-tossed saint cast anchor in the haven of eternal rest.



Sermon preached in Glenluce c. 1660

But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir, come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.' (Mt 21:38)

This that I have read to you is Scotland's sin. This day, if our king and nobles had our Lord Jesus Christ amongst them at Edinburgh, what would they do with him? They would give him a gibbet, or worse if they could devise it. For which he shall deal with them ere long.

The fruit called for

Now, here is fruit called for from these husbandmen. You will say, 'What fruit is this?' You see it is fruit in season. This fruit is called for in thee, O Scotland, this day. This fruit, Sirs, is not such fruit as ye pay your rents with, as corn, hay, or the like, that your hearts love well. No, Sirs, it is fruit in season. I will tell you, Sirs, the duties that God would have taken off your hand thirty or forty years ago in Scotland, whether preaching or

praying, or any other spiritual duty, he will not take off your hand today in Scotland. I say he will not take off your hand nor mine either, now when so much of the saints' blood has gone to seal these truths which we are all bound to own in Scotland, and in all these covenanted lands.

Now, O people of God in Scotland, there are some of you looking me in the face today. I appeal to your consciences whether this be true or not? Well, what fruit is this that is called for? Why, it is faith and repentance, love to God, and obedience to his revealed will, which many of you, yea, the most part of you, are as great strangers to as if ye had never heard the everlasting gospel preached unto you.

Fervent prayer

Now, people of God, what are you doing when such dreadful wrath is at hand in Scotland this day? He is not worth his place in Scotland this day, who does not pray half of his time to see if he can prevent the dreadful wrath that is coming on our poor motherland. O Sirs, you must pray ploughing, harrowing, shearing, and at all your other labour, yea, when ye are eating and drinking, going out and coming in, and at all your other employments. For there was never more need of them than now. Oh, that noble life we must have of communion with God! O Sirs, it is he that makes heaven pleasant! It is communion with God that makes heaven. Will ye long to be there, O people of God!

The words of the text declare that he would have fruit from you in this country side, and from you, O Glenluce. He

sent you first a crumb, and then he sent you many of his faithful servants. Now he hath sent me to you to bid you pay him his fruit. Little has he gotten from you, O Glenluce. But I will tell you what is for you, persecuted sufferers. Crowns of glory you shall wear ere long, and a remnant of you shall be preserved in all these sad days that are coming.

Make your wills

Sirs, I have news to tell you. There are many of you had need to be making your wills, for some of you will not have long to live in the world. Peace with God will soon be a good testament, Sirs, for Scotland shall be drowned in blood. And then in that day of wrath that is coming on these apostate lands for covenant-breaking with God, the testimony of a good conscience will be a good feast when a bloody sword may be at your breast. Then peace with God will help to make a good testament in that day. 'Follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.'

There are many of you here today from different places; and you are all come, professing to be worshippers of the living God, and believing folk. But I am now to describe to you five or six kinds of people who are in reality spiritually dead.

Ignorant of salvation

They are spiritually dead who are ignorant of the saving way of salvation through the covenant of redemption made betwixt the Father and the Son from all eternity. Those in Scotland ignorant of the work of God are dead spiritually; you are all dead folk. I had

**...and a Sermon
preached in Glenluce
circa 1660**

rather have one of yonder sufferers, bred at Christ's school in and through Clydesdale, than have an hundred of you to join with me. For ye have no weight with God, no grace; ye are not scholars at Christ's school. You are but dead folk.

Meaningless professions

A second kind of spiritually dead folk are you who are fair blossoming professors, but inwardly ye are as whited tombs, and are as rotten as dead graves, and have nothing but a profession, and do not know what the work of regeneration is. You too are but dead folk.

The cares of this world

A third kind of dead folk are you who are plunging in the world. You have no God but the world, and that bears most sway in your hearts. Ye are but dead folk, Sirs, and we must lay you by. If any would reprove you for your worldly-mindedness and excessive covetousness you say, 'Oh, we must labour for our living. Would you have us neglect our livelihoods?' But, O worldly miser and fool that you are, has not Christ said, 'Seek first the kingdom of heaven, and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.' O Sirs, if you trust God and give him credit, he will help you at all your work.

Friends, if you would own that covenant with him, and make him your own, I will tell you what he will do for you. He will plow your land, sow your corn, shear your corn, sell your corn, and bring home your money. I will tell you, friends, what he will do; he will even, as it were, rock the cradle, if it were necessary for you. He will condescend as low as ye desire him, but ye must once close with him, and that upon his own terms, and make a surrender of your hearts unto him.

Profanity

The fourth kind that we must lay by as spiritually dead folk, are your graceless and profane folk, both old and young. You abuse the time you should serve God in. You meet together, housefuls of you, dancing and playing, with your graceless wanton mirth, and your lusts burning strong within you; and you

think you have liberty to do this. Ye will be angry if we call you adulterers or fornicators. But God will account you such, and if you do not get repentance you are really serving the devil in your lusts, in these sinful courses.

O Sirs, is this a time for such a works when God is threatening to lay poor Scotland waste and desolate? You should rather be mourning and crying to God for shelter in such a dreadful storm, and sad days he is about to bring on these apostate, backsliding, covenant-breaking lands.

Compromisers

The fifth kind of spiritually dead are you who have gone with the storm, and have still complied, and given your consent to the banishing Christ out of poor Scotland by your bonding against him. What are ye doing, Sirs? Unless he marvelously prevent it, I fear we will lose the blessings of our Reformation, and the enemy of Christ's kirk will be back to aid his pawns still lingering among us, and you are helping him.

I will tell you more of it, Sirs. If the Lord had not gotten three or four sacrifices of the blood of the saints in Scotland, we had all been bowing to stocks and stones this day, and to black idolatry. At Pentland, Bothwell, and Ayrsmoss the blood of the saints has run, giving testimony against all the usurptions that have been made upon Christ's crown in Scotland. I tell you, the generations that are yet to arise shall partake of the benefits of the poor suffering remnant in Scotland.

Now, old folk, what are you doing? I fear the storm of persecution will lay you by. And you young folk, what are ye doing? Will you venture life and fortune to close with Christ, young men and young women in Scotland? And I will tell you news of it, as to the young men and women who have followed him in Scotland in the stormy blast, and have laid down their lives for him. Your eyes shall see them on thrones, and crowns on their heads, and clothed with robes of glory, having harps and palms in their hands.

Take heed what you are doing, for there are as sad days coming as ever were

in these lands, namely in thee, apostate Scotland, for thy perjury and apostacy. We have all cause to be afraid that God is about to transmit his vineyard to another nation, to better husbandmen who will give him his fruit better than we in Scotland have done.

Without holiness

A sixth kind of spiritually dead folk are those of you who do not have heart-holiness. Although you have a profession, yet you are but wanton professors, unconcerned about the case of the time. I fear the devil is in possession of many of you, boiling in your hearts' lusts and idols. Well, Sirs, all the ministers in the world cannot help you in your case. It must be Christ himself that must do it, as he did to Mary Magdalene. For the devil is as really in many of you as he was in her. But I fear Christ hath quitted many of you and given you your farewell clap upon your heart, that he is likely to reprove you no more until he make his fury rest upon you.

But, however, I have this to say, and remember that I have said it: Ye that want heart holiness, the devil and you shall come alike soon to eternity. I know not what I have to do amongst you this day, for it appears I can do no good. It seems the gospel is a sealed book to the most part of wanton professors in these lands and this generation. You were all perjured, complying with Prelacy, after you had covenanted with God and sworn and engaged yourselves in that covenanted work of reformation. As long as you do not mourn for that sin, as much as for adultery, whoredom, murder, stealing, etc., the gospel will never do you any good. I charge you to believe this, and ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me to tell you these things in that day when God shall summon you before his tribunal; and I leave these things upon you.

Martyrs from Galloway

But as for you, the sufferers in Scotland that God hath made choice of to give testimony for him, the poor young men and women that have suffered for him, and that he hath taken out to scaffolds, your condition is, 'A woman clothed

with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.' The sufferers in Scotland have got the world under their feet this day. If he charges any of you in this countryside to go out and suffer for him, do not deny him. He has taken few out of Galloway yet; but we know not what he will do.

Now, people of God, wait patiently, and make conscience of dealing with him, for I have news to tell you. He will stretch out his hand on all the malignants ere long. Yea, he will cut off the remnant of them out of Scotland ere long, although they have said, as in the words of our text, 'This is the heir: come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.' And if they had our Lord in Scotland this day they would certainly do so with him.

But for you, the poor, broken-hearted followers of Christ to whom he hath given grace to follow him in the storm, I tell you grace is young glory. At your first conversion our Lord gives you the one end of the line, but he keeps the other end in glory with himself. But Sirs, he will have you all there at length.

Warning against compromise with Prelacy

And now, I charge you not to meddle with any of these bonds or tests, for they will wrong you. It is the mark of the beast. The Scripture saith, 'That they that worship the beast, and receive his mark in their foreheads, or in their right hand, must have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.'

And now I charge you to take counsel of neither minister nor professor, noblemen nor gentlemen, for they will counsel you all the wrong way. The blood of many a soul in Scotland will be charged upon them. For now our cursed nobles and gentry, yes, and many ministers and professors, are come that length in apostasy that they will scare at nothing; they are all given up by God. Know what is said: 'Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse.' While they are going on in their apostasy from and against God, the martyrs are going of the scaffolds singing, rejoicing, and praising God, going to glory, leaving a

testimony against all their wicked steps of defection by shedding their innocent blood and leaving these lands in a sad case this day.

Exhortation to stand firm

O backsliding professors of Scotland, take heed to God's grace. Look that you do not fail of the grace of God in this sad day, and remember you cannot rely on past grace. Therefore, take heed what ye are doing. For it is no small measure of wrath that is upon poor Scotland at this time. I will tell you, Sirs, you had need to take heed to your doings in such an hour of temptation, when so many professors are going along with the storm; for there is nothing but divine immediate support out of heaven will hold you up in a stormy blast.

A Christian who has been a standing Christian these forty years, in an hour's time of a fiery trial, may be laid on his back and made to deny Christ. And this should make us all tremble, and be humbled before the Lord. God save you from a sudden surprising temptation of which there are many in our day in Scotland.

Sustained in suffering

But to the poor broken-hearted believer who resolves in his name, and by his strength, to stand through the storm, I have news to tell you. Christ is as much bound to hold you up, as ye are bound to suffer for him, when you are called to it. All those who have given a testimony for Christ these one-and-twenty years are a large proof of it. All of them, young and old, have been wonderfully held up; yes, unto the conviction of some of the persecutors themselves. They shall be witness against you who have flinched from the truth, or shall flinch from it, and these shall be an eternal standing witness against you.

But yet, poor broken-hearted believers, as I said to you before, it is not such a measure of holiness as that of Enoch, of Abraham, of Moses, of David, or any of these worthies that God seeks from you. It is holiness in design, and to close with the salvation in the gospel. And now take heed that you double your diligence, and fail not of the grace of God in this hour of darkness that is come,

and is further to come upon Scotland! For it is a very sad and dreadful foretold from God, that at this juncture of time he hath blown out almost all the lights in Scotland. Now I leave it on you to mind the prisoners in Scotland this day in all the prisons of Scotland, as ye will answer ill the great day for it, and take a hearty lift with them in the time of their distress.

And you young folk, I leave it on you to make conscience of closing with him. You say, 'We are but young, and have time enough to repent.' But I will tell you, the Lord needs no other rod to chastise you with, but to let you live thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, or seventy years in the world, and then if ye remain ignorant, he will cast you into hell. Therefore take heed unto yourselves.

Conventicles

And now, Sirs, I know it is neither right nor lawful for any minister or Christian in Scotland to join with others in taking houses to preach in, and to leave the fields. It were better for us all to go to the field in frost and snow to the knees, until we are wet to the skin, ere we bow to king, council, or one of them; for I know that the Lord will never bless the labours of one of them that have their liberty from them.

And, now, in the name of the Lord I charge you to lay these things to heart, and mourn all of you before the Lord for the grievous sins of all ranks, from the highest to the lowest. Labour to have a suitable impression of them upon your hearts before the Lord, for God will have many a sad question to lay home to your conscience that you shall not be able to answer. For my part, I think happy are they who have their eyes closed and shall not see the evil that is coming on our nations (Scotland and Ireland). The Bible, the word of God, can scarcely give a parallel; nor can the generation before, nor at this day, give a parallel of our sins; and therefore lay these things to heart. The churches abroad are hissing at us this day, and therefore I leave these things with you. The Lord bless them to you; for I fear we shall all have to do with it before the storm we shall certainly meet with in these lands is passed. —Amen

Book Reviews

Why Bother with Mission?

Stephen Gaukroger

Leicester, IVP, 1996, 159pp, £3.99

ISBN 0 85111 169 6

All fields of study require their own popularisers. To be 'popular' does not necessarily imply superficiality, and to describe Stephen Gaukroger's book as a popular discussion of the church's ongoing missionary responsibility is not to decry its worth. Its value is that it sums up concisely and practically much valuable information. However much academic missiological study is undertaken at seminary level, it will not bear fruit unless it is applied practically. Although churches may be able to propose theoretically, and pass with unanimity, grand visions of possible missionary involvement, all these good intentions will not bear much lasting fruit until they are adopted and implemented at a congregational level. It is so often the case that the good intentions of assemblies may in fact pave the way to destruction for those who were never reached by the practical outworking of the decision. Proposals passed will never be a vision passed on until individual Christian believers are enthused by what they see and believe.

Stephen Gaukroger's book is addressed deliberately to grass roots Christians. The book is part of a larger resource pack which include a video and a Bible study guide. (These are also available from IVP.)

In seven chapters, each of which ends with a Bible study outline and discussion questions, the author successfully conveys the urgency with which our calling must be undertaken. The humorous Foreword and Afterword by none other than the eponymous 'Lucy Fer' characterises the complacency that grips so many congregations. Throughout the book Christians are challenged to become 'World Christians' and our congregations to become 'mission-minded churches'. I have no doubt that individual Christians, as well as congregations who may choose to use the book as a discussion starter in their Bible studies, will benefit from this informative, lively, practical and challenging book.

Rev. Dr R. Watcyn-James, Bridgend

The Survivor's Guide To Church Life

James and Nina Rye

Leicester, IVP, 1992, 156pp, £4.50

ISBN 0 85110 870 9

This is a short, light and lively handling of an important and difficult subject: commitment to the local church. It is concerned with the handling of relationships, aiming to put over the positive message that fellow believers with all their failings are not simply to be put up with, but are to be loved and served. Despite all the imperfections, God has chosen to work through the church and because he in his grace has done this there is hope for the church.

It is a book for (English) church members (for instance, what is the PCC?) who need to hear that the church is not there for their entertainment, or to be in their own image. Rather there is here helpful advice on how better to regard the local fellowship and how important it is to make a contribution even if all is not to our taste. Differences in belief, attitudes to change, handling disagreements are covered with many anecdotal illustrations. Certainly a useful book for someone who is not likely to read a substantial volume on the Church, though some fuller Biblical exposition would have improved the book eg the section on the church at Corinth could have been expanded even at the expense of the section on the Beatitudes.

Rev. Gordon Palmer, Edinburgh

Authentic Christianity

From the writings of John Stott

Chosen and introduced by Timothy Dudley-Smith

Leicester, IVP, 1995, 424pp, £9.99

ISBN 0 85111 155 6

Over the last fifty years John Stott's writings number well over thirty books, hundreds of pamphlets and many short articles. In this book Timothy Dudley-Smith has undertaken a massive task in drawing together an anthology from such a wide field of Christian literature, giving us some of the best of Stott.

As the contents of this book have already been reviewed, read and appreciated by Christians world-wide in the original publications, the reviewer's

main task is to comment briefly on how this book has been put together, and its purpose.

The Foreword states, 'this book is neither a systematic theology nor even a full and balanced exposition of John Stott's thought and teaching'. Nonetheless it contains a wealth of wholesome theology and profound teaching. Beginning, as we would expect, with 'The living God', the extracts cover in considerable detail from our Lord's incarnation through to his resurrection and promised return. To name a few more, there are chapters on 'The Holy Spirit', 'Revelation and Scripture', 'Living as a Christian', 'Christian thinking on social issues' and the book ends with 'Things temporal and things eternal'. Contemporary issues, like the New Age, gender, sexuality, marriage and divorce, are also included.

There are twelve main chapters and in all they contain 970 topics, each dated and numbered to enable the reader to trace the original writing from a Source List at the end of the book. There is also a detailed Index List so that a topic can be found quickly within the book itself. As well as extensive research a lot of thought and meticulous preparation has gone into the compilation of this anthology. (Bishop Dudley-Smith, I admire your patience!)

This is not a book to be read through quickly and then discarded on a shelf. As each extract contains its own definitive comment, the book could be used for the more meditative type of reading, perhaps on a daily basis along with the Bible. It could also be a very useful source book for preachers and teachers and, indeed, any reader interested in authentic Christianity will find this an excellent book. Perhaps these extracts will also stimulate some readers to go back to the original sources for a fuller reading of John Stott's writings.

John Fergusson, Portree

The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus

John Stott

Leicester, IVP, 1996, 232pp, £9.99

ISBN 0 85111 172 6

This valuable book on two of the pasto-

ral epistles is the penultimate volume in the Bible Speaks Today New Testament series. It admirably fulfils the aim of the series to provide an accurate and readable exposition and application of the biblical text. John Stott writes in a lucid and crisp style which is fully accessible to a serious reader who has no formal theological training. The book is well researched, interacting with the arguments of ancient and modern commentators throughout.

The opening chapter discusses competing views on authorship. Stott concludes that the apostle Paul wrote both letters to Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete. However, Paul may have used an amanuensis whose contribution explains the variations in style and vocabulary relative to other Pauline epistles. No specific dates of composition are identified though Stott is sympathetic to locating the Pastorals during a period of missionary activity which the apostle may have resumed following a possible release from house arrest in Rome in the mid-60s.

The majority of the book is devoted to exegesis. Not surprisingly, there is extensive discussion of the controversial passage on the role of women in public worship (1 Tim. 2:11–15) where Paul indicates that he does not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man. Stott argues that this prohibition on teaching may be a first century cultural symbol of masculine headship which is no longer appropriate. The implication is that it is legitimate for a woman to exercise an ordained teaching ministry, especially if male headship is preserved by male leadership of the pastoral team. Other possibly controversial remarks include the disqualification from ordination of remarried divorcees and those with unbelieving dependent children.

The book is suitable for personal study and can be read fruitfully from cover to cover or simply used for reference. A sixteen page study guide makes it equally useful for small groups. Above all, the book will commend itself to pastors and preachers seeking expository sermon outlines and ideas.

Dr Ian Smith, St Andrews

The Church

Edmund Clowney
Leicester, IVP, 1995, 336pp, £12.99
ISBN 0 85111 893 3

Here is a book you should read—immediately! Why? Because it is a thoroughly Biblical, stimulating, contemporary and helpful study of the Church. It is certainly contemporary for the author pursues his subject in the context of pluralism, secularism, ecumenism, Vatican II, evangelical resurgence, the charismatic movement which ‘all compel us to consider the doctrine of the Church’ (p 24).

The author’s reformed emphasis is immediately apparent in chapter 2 where he adopts a ‘full Trinitarian approach’ (p 29) and considers the Church as the people of God with a strong Old Testament background and continuity. The principal New Testament term for Church, *ἐκκλησία*, ‘looks back’ to the covenant event of Sinai; the Church is further described as ‘God’s assembly’ not congregation (pp 30–32), ‘God’s dwelling’ (pp 32–33) and ‘God’s chosen’ (pp 33–36). Chapter 3 discusses the way we are to understand the ‘dramatic changes’ from the Old to the New and includes some helpful observations on Matthew 16:13–18. Clowney insists that ‘Peter is the rock, but Christ is the Builder. The confession cannot be separated from Peter, neither can Peter be separated from his confession’ (p 40). Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the fellowship and gift of the Spirit in which the corporate, unique nature of Pentecost and the view of the baptism in the Spirit as ‘initial blessing of the Spirit’s cleansing and renewing’ (p 69) are assumed.

From chapter 6, the author begins to look at the characteristics of the Church emphasising its apostolicity, unity, holiness and catholicity. In chapter eight (pp 99–115) Clowney endorses the Reformers’ position regarding the marks of the Church but has a welcome emphasis on the community of believers and the importance of Church membership. He also calls for wisdom and love in applying these marks to contemporary Church life both locally and denominationally warning that ‘apostatizing is a process...’ (p 106). No clear guidelines

are provided, but there is food for thought here.

Over chapters 10, 11 and 12, Clowney reminds us that the Church is called to serve God in three ways: ‘to serve Him directly in worship, to serve the saints in nurture and to serve the world in witness’ (p 117). The elements of worship ‘are simple ... neither sterile nor dull’ (p 129) and include preaching the Word, prayer in worship and song in worship; ‘dancing is nowhere mentioned in connection with New Testament worship...’. There is a healthy balance on Christ’s Kingdom as ‘a Kingdom of grace and of glory’ (p 188) and that it is Christ’s ‘saving rule that constitutes His Kingdom’ (p 189), and the implications are discussed helpfully in the context of the Church’s relation to the state.

Chapter 14 should be compulsory reading for all church leaders as the author discusses the structure of Christ’s Church for looking at its authority and offices. Clowney has a high view of elders but officers are ‘servant-managers’ (p 202). What about the ministry of women? Chapter 15 (pp 215–235) is an informed, well-argued and sensitive discussion of the issues and key texts. Because of the headship of the man over the woman and the Fall (‘Eve’s initiative reversed the relationship that she should have maintained with Adam’, p 219), women are excluded from ruling in, and teaching, the whole church. On the other hand, there is ample scope for the legitimate ministry of women outside ‘authoritative teaching in the public assembly of the church...’ (p 229).

In chapter 16 he discusses the ‘issue of the continuance of ‘signs and wonders’ which remains one of watershed importance in Christ’s Church’ (p 241). Such signs and wonders are unique for they attested ‘God’s revelation in Christ and its transmission through witnesses of His resurrection, inspired to communicate His word to the Church’ (p 243). Clowney takes issue with Grudem in the next chapter concerning his view that there are ‘two levels of prophetic ministry in the Church’ (p 257) and his criticisms are worth pondering.

The final chapter concentrates on the

sacraments and we are reminded that 'historic controversies about the sacraments are still with us' (p 275). A useful account is given concerning the baptism of the children of believers; this is a welcome, albeit brief, contribution.

Yes, the book is worth buying; and even better, it is worth reading.

Dr D. Eryl Davies, Bridgend

Confronting the New Age: How to Resist a Growing Religious Movement

Douglas Groothuis

Leicester, IVP, 1988, 230pp, £29.99

ISBN 0 85110 958 6

This book was first published some eight years ago in the USA. Therein lie both its strengths and its weaknesses for British readers. The first chapter provides an overview of some ideas which the author finds in the so-called 'New Age' worldview: things like evolutionary philosophy, monism, pantheism, altered states of consciousness, human potential, spiritism and reincarnation. The rest of the book gives a more detailed introduction to some of them, including critical analysis, together with some ideas as to how Christians may evangelize people who hold these views, as well as giving some guidance on how Christians may sort out what is worthwhile in areas such as 'New Age' music or management courses, without themselves becoming new agers.

Some will be put off by the book's somewhat strident title ('Confronting... How to resist...') but it is in fact remarkably well-written and balanced, both in its analysis of the American New Age phenomenon, and also in its Christian evaluation of it. For anyone with no knowledge at all of its subject, it could provide a useful introduction to some of the issues. It would however be a limited perspective, for two reasons:

First, the New Age has with good cause been called a 'movement': it is always on the move. Important New Age issues in the late 1980s have, for the most part, been superseded by other concerns. Then phenomena such as channelling of spirit guides or concern with crystals and other esoteric healing methodologies were undoubtedly very popular.

They have now receded in favour of a much more ambitious agenda, what New Age writers David Spangler and William Irwin Thompson call 'a reimagination of the world'. New Age today can more accurately be described as a religious manifestation of postmodernity (a term which never seems to appear at all in Groothuis). Engaging with specific phenomena is therefore less important for Christian evangelism today among people with this outlook and worldview questions (particularly the alleged complicity of Christianity in the development of secular, 'unspiritual' modernity) are far more crucial.

Further, the New Age in Britain has never been identical with its American equivalent. A significant part of the British New Age scene is not monistic, but on the contrary is highly dualistic (eg Sir George Trevelyan and the original founders of the Findhorn Community). Moreover, because of our history, neopaganism and eco-feminism have a much higher profile and are among the key ways in which the New Age presents itself today as an indigenous British (or north European) phenomenon (as distinct from the USA where native American spirituality is likely to occupy this particular sociological niche within the New Age).

Of course, in today's global culture, there are significant overlaps as well which is why this book still has value. Most people in Britain today (as well as the USA) probably have more beliefs in common with the New Age than with mainline Christianity and anything that can help Christians to understand and relate to that in a positive way can only be of value.

John Drane, Stirling

A Sting in the Tale

Roy Clements

Leicester, IVP, 1995, 160pp, £1.99

ISBN 0 85110 881 4

Tired preachers, take heart! Here are eight excellent sermons on parables in Luke's Gospel, recovering some of Jesus' original impact now lost on us through familiarity.

I do not mean you can lift them ver-

batim for next Sunday: unless you already preach this well, the congregation will notice! Rather, you will instinctively look at your own efforts and see where you could improve. Here is a taste of Clements' fresh and imaginative writing:

'On the surface, such stories seem innocuous; charming little narratives full of familiar images that easily capture your attention. In reality, they are a kind of Stealth bomber, specially designed to evade our psychological defences, insinuating themselves inside our mind in spite of every barricade we may seek to erect, and then dropping a highly explosive charge targeted at the most vulnerable point in our spiritual complacency.'

Each chapter begins with the NIV text. Clements gives just enough of the 'there and then' background of first century Israel to show the impact Christ's words must originally have had. He liberally links the stories to the 'here and now', drawing us into the encounters with Jesus which so often trigger a parable. Indeed, 'That Monday morning feeling' (ch 7) begins with six pages of analysis on the hopelessness of the human condition without God, before delving into the parable of the talents in Luke 19:11-27.

He begins with 'The seed of change' (Luke 8:1-15), explaining the Isaiah reference (though seeing, they may not see...) as 'a kind of filter' to identify true disciples from the crowds. The other texts are 10:25-37; 14:1,7-24; 15:1,2,11-32; 16:19-31; 18:9-14; 20:9-19.

Church libraries should snap up a book like this—accessible writing with ample food for thought, which can be digested in small doses. But be warned: Roy Clements' sermons, like Christ's parables, have 'a sting in the tale'.

Rev. Philip Malloch, Killearn

The invasion of the computer culture

Allen Emerson & Cheryl Forbes

Leicester, IVP, 1990, 190pp, £8.99

ISBN 0 85110 788 5

Although the co-authors of this book are both academics at Calvin College, Michigan, their interest in the topic arose

from their experience as parents who were concerned that their children were becoming so fascinated by computer games that they were neglecting reading and becoming short-tempered and withdrawn in personality. They discovered the research of Sherry Turkle (*The Second Self*, 1984) and other psychiatrists who had studied the effects of computer use on people, especially children. They conclude that computers are not good or bad in themselves, but very powerful media which are loaded with many of the values of a society which has often been fascinated by technical possibilities while lacking in-depth reflection on the impact of technology on society and individuals. They also explore some of the claims made by proponents of artificial intelligence who often compare the workings of the human mind to the algorithmic patterns of computer processing. They argue that there is a distinctive world-view arising from this, what they call the computer mentality.

Emerson and Forbes have provided us with a helpful introduction to these issues and practical suggestions for peaceful co-existence with computers rather than Luddite reaction. They believe that families need to recover the art of reading aloud together works of good fiction, among other conclusions, to counteract the dehumanising influences of obsession with computer worlds.

Graham Houston, Edinburgh

Reasons of the Heart: Recovering Christian Persuasion

William Edgar

USA, Baker Book House (Hour Glass Books), 1996, 126pp
ISBN 0 8010 5138 X

'Christian persuasion' is another name for apologetics, and the author is Professor of Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary. It is plain from his writing that he owes a great deal to the L'Abri Fellowship.

This series is 'for all who long for reformation and revival within the evangelical community. As tracts for the times, they raise major issues of the day; ...serious in tone and probing in style

but practical rather than academic, more often a first word rather than the last.' This book certainly lives up to that intention, being easy to read without being simplistic. It is Professor Edgar's contention that there has always been the 'credibility gap' between the Gospel and culture, but at the dawn of the 21st century 'the distance seems greater between the message and the audience than previously'. Despite all the wonderful means of communication, we don't 'connect'. Anyone in ministry today will know exactly what he means.

The author wants to move apologetics away from a mere series of rational proofs into a commendation of the Faith to the whole person: the kind of apologetics for which Pascal pleaded in his *Pensées*—a proper balance between mind and heart.

Edgar deals with his theme by describing first some obstacles and opportunities for recovering 'Christian persuasion' today, before moving on to examine the Biblical basis for apologetics and giving an example, in chapter 5, of how to argue for the Christian position.

In the second section, he deals with some initial barriers to belief and addresses the question many of us ask too, viz. 'why do people resist considering the most basic questions about life?' He then explores three well trodden objections to Christianity: that it is an illusion, that it is not the unique revelation of God, and that it does not answer the problem of evil. I found these three chapters particularly helpful.

Recovering 'Christian persuasion' calls for hard work and an assured faith—and the help of the Holy Spirit. This is a thought-provoking book and an ideal 'starter' for any who are challenged to enter the realm of apologetics.

Shirley A. Fraser, Aberdeen

Friends, Helpers, Lovers

Ian & Ruth Coffey

Leicester, IVP, 1996, 192pp, £5.99
ISBN 0 85111 174 2

As we were married barely four months ago my wife and I launched into this book full of eager curiosity ... and emerged with very different opinions. That's life, I suppose, or marriage any-

way! She found it superficial compared to other books she had read, which addressed specific topics in greater depth. I was struck by how relevant and readable it was. In particular it addressed many, if not all, of the issues that have loomed onto our horizon since our fateful day: communication, time, finances, contraception, starting a family, friends and faith. A generous sprinkling of case studies lends authenticity to the teaching and the authors are careful to avoid giving the impression that they are experts, preferring instead to stress that after twenty years of marriage and four children they are still learning.

The book is laced with clichés, such as 'No pain without gain' and 'Growing Christians give and giving Christians grow' but only so that the underlying folk-wisdom may be considered and conclusions drawn. In addition they add a few helpful—some might think controversial—aphorisms of their own, like 'How your wife looks is a reflection of how you love her'. In addressing the thornier issues there is a frankness which wins the confidence of the reader and a humour to set him at ease. I especially liked the passage dealing with having to present a composed exterior for leading public worship while seething away inside and how these challenges always seem to arise on Sundays!

The book is written by committed Christians for those who wish to see God honoured in their marriage and for others interested in the Christian way. It will appeal particularly to those who are fairly well involved, if not fully committed, in Christian work. That it includes a study guide relating to each chapter makes it a handy self-contained resource for marriage preparation classes. I feel that the quality of the material would also make it suitable for marriage enrichment.

Rory MacLeod, Skye